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# **Baudelairism and Modernity in the Poetry of Scapigliatura**

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PhD

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2017



## Abstract

In the 1860s, the Italian Scapigliati (literally ‘the dishevelled ones’) promoted a systematic refusal of traditional literary and artistic values, coupled with a nonconformist and rebellious lifestyle. The Scapigliatura movement is still understudied, particularly outside Italy, but it plays a pivotal role in the transition from Italian Romanticism to Decadentism. One of the authors most frequently associated with Scapigliatura in terms of literary influence as well as eccentric Bohemianism is the French poet Charles Baudelaire, certainly amongst the most innovative and pioneering figures of nineteenth-century European poetry. Studies on the relationship between Baudelaire and Scapigliatura have commonly taken into account only the most explicit and superficial Baudelairean aspects of Scapigliatura’s poetry, such as the notion of aesthetic revolt against a conventional idea of beauty, which led the Scapigliati to introduce into their poetry morally shocking and unconventional subjects. Furthermore, these studies have not focused on drawing a detailed and systematic picture that portrays the connections not only between Baudelaire and the poets of Scapigliatura, but also among the Scapigliati themselves. As a result, the true extent of Baudelaire’s influence has not been acknowledged.

This study strives to fill the gaps in the existing scholarship. My thesis posits that Baudelaire’s influence on the poetry of Scapigliatura, almost exclusively related to the first two editions of the verse collection *Les Fleurs du Mal*, is more profound and substantial than scholarship has heretofore recognised. The thesis consists of three chapters, each dedicated to one of the three most important poets of Scapigliatura, namely Arrigo Boito, Emilio Praga, and Giovanni Camerana. The investigation of Baudelaire’s influence on the Scapigliati is conducted both

individually, searching for Baudelairian features in their work, and comparatively, contrasting differences and aiming to locate similarities. The main focus is on the major poetic works that are strictly related to the phases in these poets' careers when they were associated with Scapigliatura: Boito's *Il libro dei versi* and *Re Orso*; Praga's *Tavolozza* and *Penombre*; and Camerana's poems written between 1863 and 1869. My aim is to establish if there was what can be called a 'Baudelairian school' within Scapigliatura.

Ultimately, I argue that the relationship between Baudelaire and the poetry of Scapigliatura is more complex than has previously been understood. I demonstrate a vast and wide-ranging influence – on a conceptual, lexical, and stylistic level – on the three poets discussed in this work, which can be traced back to the very beginning of their careers in the early 1860s. Far from being simply an element of aesthetic and moral rebellion in order to *épater le bourgeois*, the Baudelairism of Boito, Praga, and Camerana in their Scapigliatura years accomplished two ends: on the one hand, it preserved some of the more traditional aspects of Baudelaire's poetry, which have been largely overlooked by Italian literary scholarship on Scapigliatura; on the other hand, it introduced a thematic and formal modernity into Italian poetry, paving the way for the Decadent movement as well as the twentieth-century avant-gardes.

## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that this thesis was composed by myself, that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

Alessandro Cabiati

To Ambra, for the confidence you have in me when mine falters

*tra altre mani bollenti come arenaria in luglio*

*imponenti come grattacielo sull'orizzonte glauco*

## Acknowledgments

I would like to take this opportunity, first and foremost, to thank my supervisors Davide Messina and Peter Dayan for their guidance, confidence, support, and invaluable feedback over the last four years. I also want to deeply thank my family, who has always believed in me; my friends throughout the UK, as well as those in Italy (soprattutto Teo e la Sabry!), who show their love every time I go back; the many people I met here in Edinburgh; and of course Ambra, whose love and support kept me going even in the most difficult times. It's been a ride!



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# List of Abbreviations

Charles Baudelaire

- OC I *Œuvres complètes*, vol. I, ed. by Claude Pichois (Paris: Gallimard, 'Bibliothèque de la Pléiade', 1975)
- OC II *Œuvres complètes*, vol. II, ed. by Claude Pichois (Paris: Gallimard, 'Bibliothèque de la Pléiade', 1976)
- Corr. I *Correspondance*, vol. I: 1832-1860, ed. by Claude Pichois and Jean Ziegler (Paris: Gallimard, 'Bibliothèque de la Pléiade', 1973)
- NHE Edgar Allan Poe, *Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires*, trans. by Charles Baudelaire, ed. by Tzvetan Todorov (Paris: Gallimard, 2006)

Arrigo Boito

- OL *Opere letterarie*, ed. by Angela Ida Villa, 4th edn (Milan: Otto/Novecento, 2009)
- TS *Tutti gli scritti*, ed. by Piero Nardi (Verona: Mondadori, 1942)
- Lett. *Lettere*, ed. by Raffaello de Rensis (Milan: Lampi di stampa, 2004)

Emilio Praga

- PP *Poesie*, ed. by Mario Petrucciani (Bari: Laterza, 1969)
- SP *Schizzi a penna*, ed. by Ermanno Paccagnini (Rome: Salerno, 1993)
- MP *Memorie del presbiterio: scene di provincia* (with Roberto Sacchetti), ed. by Giuseppe Zaccaria (Turin: Einaudi, 1977)

Giovanni Camerana

- CP *Poesie*, ed. by Gilberto Finzi (Turin: Einaudi, 1968)

*Il y a du talent chez ces jeunes gens; mais que de folies! Quelles exagérations et quelle infatuation de jeunesse! Depuis quelques années je surprénais, çà et là, des imitations et des tendances qui m'alarmaient. Je ne connais rien de plus compromettant que les imitateurs, et je n'aime rien tant que d'être seul. Mais ce n'est pas possible et il paraît que l'école Baudelaire existe.*

Baudelaire, letter to Madame Aupick, 5 March 1866



# INTRODUCTION

## Writers of Transition

### 1. Scapigliatura: a Movement in Transition

In his 'Presentazione' of the group of artists and intellectuals called '*Scapigliatura Milanese*', published in 1857 in the journal *Almanacco del Pungolo*, the novelist and journalist Cletto Arrighi (pseudonym of Carlo Righetti) explains the linguistic origins as well as the specific sense he wants to give to the noun '*scapigliatura*'. While dismissing the inaccurate meanings derived from a literal interpretation of the term, which as he states '*non è una parola nuova*', namely '*l'atto dello scapigliarsi*', '*una chioma arruffata*', or '*una vita da débauché*', Arrighi presents his own definition of '*scapigliatura*', considered as '*una certa razza di gente*':

Questa casta o classe – che sarà meglio detto – vero pandemonio del secolo, personificazione della storditaggine e della follia, serbatoio del disordine, dello spirito d'indipendenza e di opposizione agli ordini stabiliti, questa classe, ripeto, che a Milano ha più che altrove una ragione e una scusa di esistere, io, con una bella e preta parola italiana, l'ho battezzata appunto: la *Scapigliatura Milanese*.<sup>1</sup>

Significantly, when in 1862 Arrighi transforms this article – the first veritable manifesto of Scapigliatura – into the 'Introduzione' to his novel *La Scapigliatura e il 6 febbraio*, he drops the adjective '*Milanese*' in order to indicate that the movement was no longer restricted to the city of Milan.<sup>2</sup> In the 1880 introduction to this novel, redefined as 'Prologo', Arrighi adds a reference that overtly signals the movement's ties with the French cultural and literary world: the caste or class referred to as

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<sup>1</sup> 'Presentazione', *Almanacco del Pungolo*, I (1857), repr. in Giuseppe Farinelli, *La Scapigliatura: profilo storico, protagonisti, documenti* (Rome: Carocci, 2003), p. 211.

<sup>2</sup> 'Introduzione', in *La Scapigliatura e il 6 febbraio* (Milan: Redaelli, 1862), repr. in Farinelli, p. 214.

Scapigliatura ‘I francesi la chiamano già da un pezzo la *bohème*’.<sup>3</sup> It is plain, from the 1857 ‘Presentazione’, that with ‘*scapigliatura*’ Arrighi aims at coining the Italian equivalent of the French ‘bohème’, by means of a word that already existed but with different connotations. As Gaetano Mariani writes, ‘Non si andrebbe quindi molto lontani dal vero affermando che assai probabilmente l’oscillazione stessa dei termini “scapigliato” e “scapigliatura” nell’opera di Arrighi riflette l’oscillazione del “bohème” e “bohême” francesi’,<sup>4</sup> as variously employed by such nineteenth-century authors as Honoré de Balzac, Henry Murger, and Gérard de Nerval to designate the rebellious and non-conformist (and most of the times miserable) lifestyle sustained by certain artists.<sup>5</sup> As a matter of fact, the names of these and other French authors – but also painters, journalists, literary schools – were a constant presence in the articles that revolved around Scapigliatura.

Scapigliatura was a movement that spanned around twenty years of literary, journalistic, musical, and artistic history. According to the chronology established by recent scholarship, Scapigliatura developed between 1856, the year of publication of Giuseppe Rovani’s ‘Preludio’ of his historical novel *Cento anni*, as well as of the founding of the journal *L’Uomo di Pietra*, and 1880, when the second edition of Arrighi’s *La Scapigliatura e il 6 febbraio* appeared in the bookshops.<sup>6</sup> As with several other authors who were part of a period of transition, in Italy the writers of Scapigliatura, simply called ‘Scapigliati’, have suffered from having lived between very significant literary and cultural movements, namely Romanticism on the one hand and Decadence (mainly referred to as ‘Decadentism’ by Italian literary

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<sup>3</sup> ‘Prologo’, in *La Scapigliatura* (Rome: Stabilimento Tipografico Italiano, 1880), repr. in Farinelli, p. 214.

<sup>4</sup> *Storia della Scapigliatura*, 2nd edn (Caltanissetta: Sciascia, 1971), p. 25.

<sup>5</sup> See Farinelli, pp. 42-43.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 56.

scholarship),<sup>7</sup> alongside Verismo, on the other. Similarly to the twentieth-century historical avant-gardes, several Scapigliati devoted themselves to the practice of various arts, such as prose, poetry, theatre, drawing, painting, instrumental music, opera, and journalism. Yet Scapigliatura was not a well-organised movement, and there was no manifesto signed by the leading authors, let alone a shared ideology. In fact, there were different schools and various manifestos, and this is certainly one of the reasons why late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century critics struggled to recognise Scapigliatura as a movement. Today the Scapigliati's historical importance and aesthetic quality are finally being acknowledged: studies carried out in the last few decades on journalism in the years 1860-1880 have shown the depth and breath of the relationships between the various authors and established that, using Farinelli's words, Scapigliatura has the right to be called a 'movimento' and not only an accidental 'momento' in literary history, reacting to the crisis of traditional values and anticipating Decadentism and Verismo.<sup>8</sup>

The focus of this study is, in particular, the poetic production of Scapigliatura. For many years, Italian literary criticism generally divided the nineteenth-century poetic scene in Italy into Romanticism and Decadentism, and this interpretation led scholars to bring the poets of Scapigliatura close to one or the other of these movements, but especially to Romanticism. Various expressions such as 'Lombardy's second Romanticism' have been utilised to describe Scapigliatura and

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<sup>7</sup> Henceforth I will use the term 'Decadentism' to indicate specifically the Italian movement, and the more neutral 'Decadence' to refer to the literary tendency that developed in *fin-de-siècle* Europe.

<sup>8</sup> Farinelli, p. 64. For journalism in Scapigliatura, see Giuseppe Farinelli, ed., *La pubblicistica nel periodo della Scapigliatura. Regesto per soggetti dei giornali e delle riviste esistenti a Milano e relativi al primo ventennio dello Stato unitario: 1860-1880* (Milan: IPL, 1984).



to assess it negatively, and to underline the Scapigliati's supposed provincialism.<sup>9</sup> These adverse evaluations, along with the idea of Scapigliatura as part of a late Romantic trend, began with Giosuè Carducci, who defined the poets of Scapigliatura as 'terza generazione di romantici' in his 1880 article 'Dieci anni a dietro'.<sup>10</sup> A few years later, the highly influential philosopher and critic Benedetto Croce deliberately chose not to consider Scapigliatura as a literary group, and in his *La letteratura della nuova Italia* (1914) he dedicated separate chapters to the major authors, including the poets that shall be treated in our work, that is to say Arrigo Boito, Emilio Praga, and Giovanni Camerana. According to Croce, for instance, Boito was a Romantic author who displayed 'ciarpame romantico', but he also stated that 'Il romanticismo, come visione sconvolta, straziata e antitetica della vita, non ha avuto un poeta in Italia se non dopo il 1860, e in Arrigo Boito'.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Praga was depicted as 'bevitore d'assenzio, bestemmiatore, descrittore di orge. [...] Egli ci dava un senso di smarrimento e di malessere, una ripugnanza, venata appena di giovanile curiosità per lo spettacolo malsano'.<sup>12</sup>

Croce's lukewarm judgement became, more or less consistently, the customary reading of Scapigliatura's works in the first half of the twentieth century, and although some scholars did recognise the novelty of themes and forms that the poets of Scapigliatura brought into the Italian literary situation, their aesthetic evaluation was still rather unenthusiastic. This is the case of Walter Binni in *La poetica del decadentismo* (1936), who acknowledged the dissimilarity between Scapigliatura's

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<sup>9</sup> See Angelo Romanò, *Il secondo romanticismo lombardo e altri saggi sull'ottocento italiano* (Milan: Fabbri, 1958).

<sup>10</sup> 'Dieci anni a dietro', in *Opere*, 30 vols (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1937), XXIII, 251.

<sup>11</sup> *La letteratura della nuova Italia*, 6 vols, 6th edn (Bari: Laterza, 1956), I, 254.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 236.

poetry and the authors of Italian Romanticism, analysing the former's efforts to modernise Italian literature. Binni's verdict, however, is certainly not positive:

gli scapigliati, ubriaconi e suicidi, restano dei novellini, cui una speciale pratica non riesce a creare un accento che li personalizzi. Gli scapigliati sono degli abnormi che non hanno una base profonda per la loro libertà. [...] Hanno dunque un valore soprattutto storico e quasi nullo artisticamente.<sup>13</sup>

Even though the poets of Scapigliatura showed scepticism towards the worn-out ideas of Italian Romanticism, together with some elements of a new kind of poetics, they were not able to develop these new features. The context of Binni's examination is the investigation of the origins of Decadentism, a movement he believes has well-defined aesthetic characteristics. What we see here, primarily, is that Scapigliatura is not yet considered a freestanding movement with its own personality. Binni does not conceive another literary school between Romanticism and Decadentism: he confronts the Scapigliati with the stylistic and thematic qualities of those movements, determining whether they were part of one or the other.<sup>14</sup> He establishes a difference between the 'decadenza del romanticismo' and Decadentism, the first one being 'esteriorizzamento di atteggiamenti e schemi romantici, non più sostenuti da reale romanticismo'.<sup>15</sup> After affirming that the Scapigliati shared some features with other European Decadent circles, he better defines his thought by claiming that 'in realtà si tratta ancor più di una *bohème* romantica che di un cenacolo decadente',<sup>16</sup> because they simply introduced motifs of European Romanticism into Italian literature without being able to develop a modern and original poetics. This is the key to Binni's argument: Italian Romanticism lacked the mystical and sensual elements

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<sup>13</sup> *La poetica del decadentismo*, 5th edn (Florence: Sansoni, 1977), p. 61.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 60-69.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

present in the other countries, which paved the way for the Decadent movement, and Scapigliatura's 'innovation' was precisely the lyrical treatment of those *macabre* and *sinister* subjects already present in European Romanticism, such as corpses, morgues, and anatomical dissections.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the Scapigliati were still part of the 'decadence of Romanticism', instead of being properly *Decadents*. The main distinction between Romanticism and Decadentism lay in the latter's development of the poetics of the unconscious, the focal characteristic of which was the dissolution of meaning towards the 'coscienza musicale di un'interiorità così profonda da confondersi col mistero'.<sup>18</sup> Words that become music, then: this was the new sensibility and the new style of Decadentism, whereas the Scapigliati did not manage to turn the Romantic material into a poetics of impressions and sensations.

By acknowledging the links between Romanticism and Decadentism, and the perpetuation of topics, Binni follows the theories of Mario Praz, according to whom literary Decadence was simply a development of Romanticism. In *La carne, la morte e il diavolo nella letteratura romantica* (1930) Praz claims that Decadence was a continuation of the 'erotic sensibility' of Romanticism, centred upon the sensual and sinister attraction for a corrupted and melancholic beauty. Consequently, the main dissimilarity was a matter of technique – they shared similar themes, although these were presented with different styles.<sup>19</sup> With the strong connections between Decadentism and Romanticism, and their ambiguous features as described by literary scholarship, we can understand why scholars have generally tended to deem Scapigliatura to be closer to either one or the other movement, or, as Francesco Flora has shown, as having characteristics that can be variously related to both. In the

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>19</sup> *The Romantic Agony*, trans. by Angus Davidson, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951).

section dedicated to Scapigliatura in his *Storia della letteratura italiana* (1940), Flora defines Scapigliatura as a ‘moto contraddittorio, come di chi volesse in un medesimo punto abbracciare due motivi divergenti’.<sup>20</sup> the Scapigliati’s approach to poetry was still somewhat Romantic, as they treasured ‘il sentimento stesso del non sapersi adeguare alle cose superandone il contrasto’. Nonetheless, this was primarily a negative attitude derived from Romanticism, an inclination towards art and life that the poets of Scapigliatura shared with Romantic writers, rather than a genuine Romantic poetics, since ‘essa [la poetica Romantica] sfugge e vapora quando si scenda al diretto esame dell’opera [della Scapigliatura]’.<sup>21</sup> The Scapigliati, with their analyses of the darkest aspects of the human being, were thus precursors of the ‘modern’ poets: ‘la Scapigliatura, per la sua umana sofferenza, tocca l’animo dei moderni, affaticati e rosi da più disperata desolazione’.<sup>22</sup> Eventually, Flora not only distances the works of Scapigliatura from Romanticism, but also acknowledges the originality of the movement and its importance for the future developments of Italian literature, particularly for the so-called Crepuscolari at the beginning of the twentieth century:

La Scapigliatura, perduto il carattere ribelle e polemico, sarà un’esperienza di semplificazione formale e di sincerità [...]. Questa esperienza gioverà agli Scapigliati e gioverà alla letteratura italiana posteriore, in quel filone che sarà dei poeti provincialeschi, ai quali si suol dare nome di ‘crepuscolari’.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Storia della letteratura italiana*, 5 vols, 13th edn (Milan: Mondadori, 1962), V, 113.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 115-116.

Indeed, the first monographic studies on Scapigliatura, including Piero Nardi's influential *Scapigliatura* (1924),<sup>24</sup> generally associated the poets of the movement mainly with Romanticism. Starting from the second half of the twentieth century, some scholars – certainly not all of them – attempted more vigorously to link some features of Scapigliatura to literary Decadence. This focus on Scapigliatura's Decadent traits is part of studies that highlight its 'modern' and 'innovative' characteristics as opposed to 'traditional' and 'Romantic' ones: it is not a coincidence that the emphasis on Scapigliatura's Decadent characteristics coincides with the first efforts at re-evaluating Scapigliatura's literary works. Over the past few decades, critical analyses aimed at retrieving and re-evaluating the texts of Scapigliatura, among which Mariani's fundamental work, *Storia della Scapigliatura* (1967), have progressively underlined its connections to Decadentism. Some scholars saw a passage from Scapigliatura to Decadentism within the literary products of the single authors, such as Giorgio Petrocchi, who argued that the poets of Scapigliatura 'Nascono scapigliati e finiscono', after their rebellious and militant period in the 1860s, 'nella più pura poetica decadentistica'. After all, Petrocchi continues, 'la poetica della Scapigliatura, superato il primo momento di pura esagitazione formalistica del romanticismo, non può non identificarsi col decadentismo'.<sup>25</sup> According to other critics, already in the 1860s the poetry of Scapigliatura 'si attestò in chiari annunci decadentistici'.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Scapigliatura: da Giuseppe Rovani a Carlo Dossi* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1924). This volume has been republished, with some modifications, with another publisher as *Scapigliatura: da Giuseppe Rovani a Carlo Dossi* (Milan: Mondadori, 1968). Henceforth, I shall use this last edition as reference.

<sup>25</sup> 'Sulla poesia di Giovanni Camerana', in *Poesia e tecnica narrativa*, 2nd edn (Milan: Mursia, 1965), pp. 17, 25.

<sup>26</sup> Farinelli, *La Scapigliatura*, p. 11.

Despite the frequent use of the expressions ‘Decadent’ and ‘Decadentism’, however, scholars have had difficulties in critically defining what Scapigliatura’s Decadent characteristics actually are. This has probably been due to the fact that the expression Decadentism – and indeed its supposed English equivalent, *Decadence* – is problematic to define in a literary context, principally because according to the country – and its related historical criticism – the term acquires different meanings. In France, for instance, ‘Décadence’, occasionally referred to as ‘Décadentisme’ or even ‘Décadisme’, was a minor poetic movement in the 1880s, the exponents of which established journals such as *Le Décadent*, and it is generally considered to be an anticipation of Symbolism, at best a first phase of it, although in fact the two movements did coexist for a period.<sup>27</sup> In 1886, Jean Moréas published his ‘Manifeste du Symbolisme’ in *Le Figaro Littéraire*, thereby officially founding the Symbolist movement and breaking away from the Decadents, since he considered the term ‘décadence’ as derisory and intolerable.<sup>28</sup> In the Anglophone world, Decadence is commonly associated with Aestheticism and particularly with the work of Oscar Wilde, who ‘cultivated a continental and decadent persona, deliberately to clash with the prevailing nationalistic ideal in British culture’.<sup>29</sup> In Italy, ‘Decadentism’ constitutes one of the most important historical categories in literary scholarship, and generally indicates late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century poetry, especially Gabriele D’Annunzio and Giovanni Pascoli.

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Patrick McGuinness, ‘Introduction’, in *Symbolism, Decadence and the ‘fin de siècle’: French and European Perspectives*, ed. by Patrick McGuinness (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), pp. 6-8.

<sup>28</sup> Richard Shryock, ‘Reaction Within Symbolism: The École Romane’, *The French Review*, 71, no. 4 (March 1998), p. 577.

<sup>29</sup> Jane Desmarais and Chris Baldick, ‘Introduction’, in *Decadence: An Annotated Anthology* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 8.

In recent times, scholars have started to broaden the meaning of Decadence to all post-romantic literary activities characterised by feelings of ‘negativity’, ‘pessimism’, and ‘anxiety’; that is to say, the alienated and *déraciné* condition of the modern human being. Elio Gioanola claims that his ‘rivalutazione del Decadentismo’, in the sense of a new interpretation of its chronological, formal, and thematic boundaries, ‘è, e vuole essere, piena e radicale’.<sup>30</sup> Fundamentally, Gioanola disassociates himself from Binni’s concept of musicality to focus exclusively on the idea of the unconscious – after the crisis of Romantic values and the loss of enthusiasm for religious and patriotic themes, the unconscious marked the transition from the sentimentalism of the Romantics to the sadism and masochism of the Decadents. Gioanola extends the term Decadence virtually to all the twentieth-century literary movements that had a peculiar feature in common: a sense of existential crisis derived from the modern way of life, with all the topics, motifs, and styles.<sup>31</sup> Instead of considering Decadence as a historical phenomenon, he thinks of it as a tendency that began ‘all’indomani delle grandi rivoluzioni nazionali e, per l’Italia, della raggiunta unità della nazione’,<sup>32</sup> namely in the second half of the nineteenth century. By treating Decadence as a concept and not just a movement with specific aesthetic and stylistic features, Gioanola – unlike Binni – understands it as a common denominator of many literary activities. This leads Gioanola to consider the Scapigliati as having pronounced Decadent characteristics, for he states that they were the ‘primi rappresentanti nostrani della fauna decadente’.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *Il Decadentismo*, 2nd edn (Rome: Studium, 1991), p. 26.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 8-9, 31-32.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Following Gioanola's notion of Decadence, yet limiting it to the literary schools between Romanticism and Modernism, in his work *Decadence and the Making of Modernism* (1995) David Weir develops the idea that 'decadence is transition', arguing the following:

the various nineteenth-century movements that proliferate in the period between romanticism and modernism (naturalism, symbolism, Parnassianism [...]) can best be understood if they are all seen as grounded in some concept of decadence or decadentism.<sup>34</sup>

Weir presents Decadence as a cultural transition from Romanticism to Modernism, being the common characteristic underlying the various and multifaceted literary trends in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Literary Decadence thus incorporated themes such as illness, physical and moral degeneration, cultural refinement, perversity, bestiality, artificiality, and so forth. It is 'less a period of transition than a dynamics of transition'<sup>35</sup> with contradictory and oxymoronic features, because the proto-modernist writers of Decadence 'are working with an unsettled aesthetics that [...] is a reaction to or a revision of an earlier literary tradition',<sup>36</sup> more precisely a mixture of literary tendencies. This concept of Decadence as a set of features common to numerous post-Romantic movements is shared by many critics in modern scholarship. Desmarais and Baldick affirm that Decadence is not to be considered as a movement or a school but a tendency that 'embodied a peculiar post-Romantic form of protest against modern civilisation and against inherited literary and cultural assumptions'.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, like Gioanola before them and probably influenced by the current re-evaluation of Scapigliatura, they include the movement

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<sup>34</sup> *Decadence and the Making of Modernism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), p. xvi.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>37</sup> 'Introduction', p. 1.



in the category of Decadentism: ‘In Italian [...] *decadentismo* [refers] to the poetry of sensation of poets like the Milanese *scapigliati*’.<sup>38</sup>

The idea of Scapigliatura as part of a broader notion of Decadence, hence not merely having some characteristics but a well-defined critical place within Decadence, has also been taken into account in criticism dedicated to Scapigliatura. Focusing almost exclusively on Scapigliatura’s fiction, David Del Principe argues that ‘decadent elements in Scapigliatura are less evidence of romantic decay than of the creative vitality of modernism’.<sup>39</sup> Scapigliatura, he asserts, is more than an expression of exhausted Romanticism, because its authors shared ‘a common aesthetic with writers of the Decadent period’, namely the principle of the autonomy of art or ‘pure’ poetry linked to the investigation of the unconscious.<sup>40</sup> In Del Principe’s view, the Scapigliati are the precursors of Modernism and the avant-gardes, and as such worthy of being considered part of Decadence: ‘Scapigliatura’s “decadence” propels it toward the fin de siècle and to the brink of the twentieth-century avant-garde’.<sup>41</sup>

In spite of – or exactly because of – their different opinions, all these disparate interpretations unequivocally show Scapigliatura’s status in Italian literary history as a *movement in transition*, from a literature still governed by Romantic values to a proper *fin-de-siècle* sensibility. As I shall demonstrate in this work, the oxymoronic situation of the poets of Scapigliatura as both latecomers and predecessors derived, principally, from the crucial discovery and extensive reading

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> *Rebellion, Death, and Aesthetics in Italy: The Demons of Scapigliatura* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1996), p. 110.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 112-113.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

of the first (1857) and second (1861) edition of Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*.

## 2. Baudelaire: 'écrivain en retard' or the First Poet of Modernity?

*Les Fleurs du Mal*, Baudelaire's first collection of poetry, appeared on the shelves of Paris bookshops in June 1857, although Baudelaire had already published a few poems in various journals since 1844-45.<sup>42</sup> In 1886, the historian Ernest Prarond, a friend of Baudelaire's, stated that the majority of the poems included in the first edition of the *Fleurs* were composed in the 1840s,<sup>43</sup> that is, in a period still dominated by Romantic ideals and by poets of the Romantic school such as Victor Hugo, Sainte-Beuve, and Théophile Gautier, all of whom were Baudelaire's acquaintances (as well as early poetic models). In the 1840s, when he dedicates most of his critical articles to Romantic writers and painters, Baudelaire maintains an ambivalent relationship with the movement. He collaborates with the journal *Corsaire-Satan* directed by Pétrus Borel, who was an exponent of the 'Frénétiques' (or 'Bousingots'), a Bohemian group of Romantic writers famous for artistic and aesthetic eccentricities. In some of his poems of that time, such as 'L'Irrémédiable', 'Le Vampire' or 'Les Litanies de Satan', Baudelaire strives to revitalise the bizarre and Gothic imagery of 'Frénétisme' that was relatively popular in the previous decade: vampires, corpses, Satan, tombs, and so forth.<sup>44</sup> Not only in the 1840s, when

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<sup>42</sup> Even though Baudelaire officially published his first poem, 'À une Créole', in the periodical *L'Artiste* on 25 May 1845, according to Arsène Houssaye, director of the journal, Baudelaire published four sonnets in *L'Artiste* in December 1844 under the name of his friend Alexandre Privat d'Anglemont. See Claude Pichois, 'Notices, notes et variantes', in OC I, pp. 1259-1260.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Graham Robb, *La Poésie de Baudelaire et la poésie française: 1838-1852* (Paris: Aubier, 1993), pp. 18-19, 21.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 133.

the Romantic inspiration was already fading away, but also in the 1850s Baudelaire could appear as an ‘écrivain en retard’<sup>45</sup> to contemporary readers, for the prevailing literary fashion of the time was not the usage of themes of ‘Frénétisme’, but the sterile imitation of well-known Romantic poets such as Hugo, Alphonse de Lamartine, and Alfred de Musset. Yet Baudelaire’s Gothic and Baroque exaggerations were not merely a homage to a previous generation of writers – they were, rather, a parodic condemnation of the artificiality of conventional literary forms.<sup>46</sup>

Baudelaire outlines his thoughts on Romanticism in the chapter ‘Qu’est-ce que le romantisme?’ of the *Salon de 1846*:

Qu’on se rappelle les troubles de ces derniers temps, et l’on verra que, s’il est resté peu de romantiques, c’est que peu d’entre eux ont trouvé le romantisme [...]. Quelques-uns ne se sont appliqués qu’au choix des sujets; ils n’avaient pas le tempérament de leurs sujets. – D’autres, croyant encore à une société catholique, ont cherché à refléter le catholicisme dans leurs œuvres. – S’appeler romantique et regarder systématiquement le passé, c’est se contredire. (OC II, p. 420)

Baudelaire distances himself from what he considers an old and obsolete conception of Romanticism, which gave prevalence to the choice of historical subjects of the past or to the celebration of religious feelings. Shortly before this passage, he had illustrated his own definition of Romanticism:

Le romantisme n’est précisément ni dans le choix des sujets ni dans la vérité exacte, mais dans la manière de sentir. [...] Pour moi, le romantisme est l’expression la plus récente, la plus actuelle du beau. [...] le romantisme ne consistera pas dans une exécution parfaite, mais dans une conception analogue à la morale du siècle. [...] Qui dit romantisme dit art moderne, – c’est-à-dire intimité, spiritualité, couleur, aspiration vers l’infini, exprimées par tous les moyens que contiennent les arts. Il suit de là qu’il y a une contradiction évidente entre le romantisme et les œuvres de ses principaux sectaires. (OC II, pp. 420-421)

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<sup>45</sup> Baudelaire proudly defines himself as such in his review of Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*. See OC II, p. 76.

<sup>46</sup> Robb, p. 135.

Romanticism is not about subjects or the search for truth, it is instead a manner of feeling – its principal aim is the expression of the spiritual and moral attitudes of the society of the time. Baudelaire hence crowns the painter Eugène Delacroix as the *chef de file* of his notion of Romanticism, excluding the most famous writer of the movement, Hugo: ‘si ma définition du romantisme (intimité, spiritualité, etc.) place Delacroix à la tête du romantisme, elle en exclut naturellement M. Victor Hugo’ (OC II, p. 430). In the last chapter of the *Salon*, titled ‘De l’héroïsme de la vie moderne’, Baudelaire explains where the modern Romantic artist should look in order to find the beauty that best represents contemporary culture:

on peut affirmer que puisque tous les siècles et tous les peuples ont eu leur beauté, nous avons inévitablement la nôtre. [...] Le spectacle de la vie élégante et des milliers d’existences flottantes qui circulent dans les souterrains d’une grande ville, – criminels et filles entretenues, – [...] nous prouvent que nous n’avons qu’à ouvrir les yeux pour connaître notre héroïsme. [...] Il y a donc une beauté et un héroïsme moderne! (OC II, pp. 493, 495)

By unifying the concepts of Romanticism and modern beauty, Baudelaire coins his definition of modern art, which must be an expression of ‘heroic’ contemporary life. According to him, artists needed to focus on subjects of their own time that were not linked to patriotism or political heroism, thereby conveying modern beauty. Baudelaire essentially reformulates Romantic aesthetics to make it adequate to modern times: the key features of this *new* Romanticism, namely ‘intimité, spiritualité, couleur, aspiration vers l’infini’ were, after all, major characteristics of the first generation of German and English Romantics.<sup>47</sup> His re-configuration of Romanticism as well as the poems of the 1840s were thus a ‘déclaration de guerre

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. Virgil Nemoianu, *The Taming of Romanticism: European Literature and the Age of Biedermeier* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 26-27.

contre la poésie romantique’,<sup>48</sup> against the sentimental Romantic poets, called by Baudelaire the ‘fausse école romantique en poésie’ (OC II, p. 409); they were, in brief, an explicit attempt to establish a new Romanticism rooted in modernity.

Baudelaire explains his ideas on art and modern life in *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* (1863), dedicated to the artist C. G., later identified as the illustrator and painter Constantin Guys. In the ‘Éloge du maquillage’, a section of the essay, Baudelaire condemns the Rousseauian notion that had become part of the Romantic conception of beauty: the natural goodness of the human being, and with that the view of nature as the sign of the divine and the only source of beauty. Baudelaire declares that ‘La plupart des erreurs relatives au beau naissent de la fausse conception du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle relative à la morale’ (OC II, p. 715). Here Baudelaire subverts Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s renowned idea of human nature as good, and claims that people had mistakenly repudiated the theory of original sin since the eighteenth century. Therefore, crime and destructiveness are innate in the human being: ‘Le mal se fait sans effort, *naturellement*, par fatalité’ (OC II, p. 715). Baudelaire contrasts the naturalness and spontaneity of evil to the artificiality of good, claiming that ‘le bien est toujours le produit d’un art’ (OC II, p. 715). Consequently, good and beauty are not natural, but artificial, and fashion must be considered as a manifestation of art, precisely a ‘symptôme du goût de l’idéal surnageant dans le cerveau humain [...], comme une déformation sublime de la nature, ou plutôt comme un essai permanent et successif de réformation de la nature’ (OC II, p. 716). This idea of the superiority of the artificial beauty of art over the natural one is central to Baudelaire’s later thought, particularly from the 1850s

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<sup>48</sup> Robb, p. 164.

onwards; his opinions on nature, however, were ultimately rather conflicting, always maintaining a link with a Platonic and Romantic tradition and shifting from a youthful confidence displayed in the 1840s to the denunciation (which was never quite the utter rejection asserted by certain scholarship) of its wickedness in the 1860s, as we shall see later on.

The other subject that is pivotal in Baudelaire's imagery is the necessity for the artist to investigate 'modernité', in his quest for modern beauty. Baudelaire develops his most famous definition in 'La Modernité', the fourth chapter of *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*. There he asserts that the modern artist must search for modernity – the aim for the artist should be 'de dégager de la mode ce qu'elle peut contenir de poétique dans l'historique, de tirer l'éternel du transitoire' (OC II, p. 694). By delving deeper into topics already examined in the *Salon de 1846*, particularly the issue of the subjects chosen by contemporary artists, Baudelaire reaffirms that the modern writer and painter should not clothe subjects in the dress of the past. On the contrary, it would be better if they applied themselves to the task of extracting the 'beauté mystérieuse qui y peut être contenue [dans l'habit d'une époque]' (OC II, p. 695), even in an epoch as hideous as the mid-nineteenth century. According to Baudelaire, 'modernité' is 'le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent, la moitié de l'art, dont l'autre moitié est l'éternel et l'immuable' (OC II, p. 695). Baudelaire employs the neologism 'modernité' to refer to the qualities of an artist to convey the contemporary and transitory features of their own times: unlike other Romantic writers, Baudelaire searched for beauty in the subjects of his present day. In his essay 'Charles Baudelaire', a profoundly Decadent reading of Baudelaire published on 16 November 1865 in the journal *L'Art*, Paul Verlaine portrays

Baudelaire as the quintessential ‘modern man’, arguing the following: ‘La profonde originalité de Charles Baudelaire, c’est, à mon sens, de représenter puissamment et essentiellement l’homme moderne’.<sup>49</sup> Starting from the 1860s, Baudelaire’s idea of beauty would be increasingly associated with a notion of modernity employed to represent the spectacle of modern life.

In verse, Baudelaire’s legacy of modernity is certainly the section ‘Tableaux parisiens’ of the second edition of the *Fleurs*, in which Paris and the characters of the modern metropolis become poetic subjects, with all their ugliness and contradictions, stylistically represented by figures of speech such as oxymora and antitheses. Numerous elements of Baudelaire’s poetry were regarded by *fin-de-siècle* critics and authors alike – among whom Verlaine and, as we shall see in the following paragraph, Gautier – as fundamentally Decadent: shocking images of everyday life, death, and decomposition; the juxtaposition of a colloquial register with a highly refined language, and the use of bizarre terminology; references to lust, sadism, and perversion, linked to the intimate analysis of the darkest recesses of the human soul; the anguish derived from the impossibility of the sublimation of unconscious instincts through religious ideals; the pursuit of an artificial archetype; the idea of synaesthetic *correspondances* between different senses. In late-nineteenth-century France there were contrasting opinions regarding the quality of Baudelaire’s Decadent features. The conservative critic Ferdinand Brunetière, for instance, despised what Paul Bourget called ‘Théorie de la décadence’ in his *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* (1883), which considered Baudelaire as a ‘théoricien de décadence’ and the most important representative of the modern sensibility with his

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<sup>49</sup> ‘Charles Baudelaire’, in *Œuvres en prose complètes*, ed. by Jacques Borel (Paris: Gallimard, ‘Bibliothèque de la Pléiade’, 1972), pp. 599-600.

glorification of solipsism and morbid visions.<sup>50</sup> As Patricia A. Ward affirms, modernity ‘became for some synonymous with decadence, with poetry of the city, with the poet as *flâneur*, and with the sense of the anonymity of nineteenth-century crowds’.<sup>51</sup>

In the introduction to the third and posthumous edition of the *Fleurs* (1868), Théophile Gautier was one of the first to associate, in a positive fashion, Baudelaire’s poetry to the term *decadence*. This essay, described by Weir as ‘a veritable *ars poetica* of decadence’,<sup>52</sup> has set the stage for much of the future Decadent interpretation of Baudelaire. Gautier states:

Le poète des *Fleurs du mal* aimait ce qu’on appelle improprement le style de décadence, et qui n’est autre chose que l’art arrivé à ce point de maturité extrême que déterminent à leurs soleils obliques les civilisations qui vieillissent: style ingénieux, compliqué, savant, plein de nuances et de recherches, reculant toujours les bornes de la langue, empruntant à tous les vocabulaires techniques, [...] écoutant pour les traduire les confidences subtiles de la névrose, les aveux de la passion vieillissante qui se déprave et les hallucinations bizarres de l’idée fixe tournant à la folie. Ce style de décadence est le dernier mot du Verbe sommé de tout exprimer et poussé à l’extrême outrance.<sup>53</sup>

Since then, Baudelaire has been considered by many to be the father or forerunner of literary Decadence, not only in nineteenth-century but in twentieth-century and contemporary scholarship as well. In 1906 Frank Pearce Sturm, one of the first translators of Baudelaire’s work into English, asserted that ‘Baudelaire *is* decadence; his art is not a mere literary affectation, a mask of sorrow to be thrown aside when the curtain falls, but the voice of an imagination plunged into the contemplation of

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<sup>50</sup> See Brunetière, *L’Évolution de la poésie lyrique en France au dix-neuvième siècle*, 2 vols (Paris: Hachette, 1906), II, 231-236. See also Bourget, *Essais de psychologie contemporaine*, 2 vols (Paris: Plon, 1931), I, 19-26.

<sup>51</sup> ‘Preface’, in *Baudelaire and the Poetics of Modernity*, ed. by Patricia A. Ward (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2001), p. ix.

<sup>52</sup> *Decadence and the Making of Modernism*, p. 88.

<sup>53</sup> *Baudelaire*, ed. by Jean-Luc Steinmetz (Bordeaux: Le Castor astral, 1991), pp. 45-46.



all the perverse and fallen loveliness of the world'.<sup>54</sup> Three decades later Binni affirmed that Baudelaire had to be deemed as one of the 'padri di decadentismo', and that the 'importanza di Baudelaire per il decadentismo è massiccia'.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, Gioanola described Baudelaire as an anticipator and cornerstone of the new Decadent sensibility.<sup>56</sup> Weir instead went as far as declaring Baudelaire 'the archetypal decadent figure'.<sup>57</sup>

Other critics and writers, however, resolved to detach Baudelaire's modernity from the notion of Decadence. Since the publication of Walter Benjamin's essays on Baudelaire, particularly those taken from his unfinished study *Charles Baudelaire: Ein Lyriker im Zeitalter des Hochkapitalismus* (1969), the terms *modernity* and *modern* have been frequently linked to a fundamentally socio-historical reading of Baudelaire. Benjamin underlined Baudelaire's constant use of allegory, originating from the anonymity and dejection of the self in an industrial capitalist society,<sup>58</sup> and his representation of the city of Paris (and its inhabitants) during the French second empire. According to Benjamin, who attempted to define his 'Modernity', Baudelaire was the first major modern poet. Benjamin sees the *Fleurs du Mal* as 'an arsenal: Baudelaire wrote certain of his poems in order to destroy others written before his own'.<sup>59</sup> Nonetheless, there have been numerous scholars who have given their own critical definition of Baudelaire's poetic modernity, often entirely separate from Benjamin's Marxist views. Patrick Labarthe, for instance, sees the *Fleurs* as the 'première œuvre de la modernité poétique' and allegory as the key factor of this

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<sup>54</sup> Quoted by Desmarais and Baldick, p. 6.

<sup>55</sup> *La poetica del decadentismo*, pp. 23, 26.

<sup>56</sup> *Il Decadentismo*, p. 29.

<sup>57</sup> *Decadence and the Making of Modernism*, p. xv.

<sup>58</sup> 'Central Park', in *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings, trans. by Howard Eiland and others (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 163.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

modernity, since Baudelaire's poetic conscience 'confie à l'allégorie le soin de tracer le chemin, toujours *autre*, d'une saisie du réel qui prenne en compte [...] la double dimension de perte et de fragmentation qui caractérise l'âge moderne'.<sup>60</sup> Labarthe's analysis highlights Baudelaire's original use of the allegory in modern times and with modern subjects – with its overt links, both on a rhetorical and theological level, to a Medieval and Baroque tradition – also finding expressions of modernity in the colour *black* frequently employed in Baudelaire's poems,<sup>61</sup> and in the concept of monstrosity,<sup>62</sup> eventually claiming that 'Baudelaire est le premier poète de la modernité, dans la mesure peut-être où il est le dernier grand poète allégorique'.<sup>63</sup> According to Jonathan Culler, Baudelaire is *modern* because he 'produces dissonant combinations, which can be seen as reflecting the dissociated character of modern experience'.<sup>64</sup> Culler argues that 'a major aspect of Baudelaire's modernity' is 'The repudiation of sentimental themes', which he juxtaposes to the kind-heartedness and compassion showed by Hugo in creating sympathetic characters.<sup>65</sup> Baudelaire is, thus, 'the prophet of modernity', since 'his lyrics can be read as asking how one can experience or come to terms with the modern world and as offering poetic consciousness as a solution – albeit a desperate one, requiring a passage through negativity'.<sup>66</sup> In her recent *Seeing Double: Baudelaire's Modernity* (2011), Françoise Meltzer links Baudelaire's treatment of modernity to the notion of 'double vision: one of the world as it was, and one as it is', arguing that this is 'a vision in which the past has not yet caught up with the present, and in which the future seems

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<sup>60</sup> *Baudelaire et la tradition de l'allégorie* (Geneva: Droz, 1999), p. 616.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 510.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 616.

<sup>64</sup> 'Introduction', in Charles Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, trans. by James McGowan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. xxv.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxviii.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxxi.

threatening. Baudelaire records his encounter with modernity as an unintelligible morass of contradictions that he cannot resolve'.<sup>67</sup>

Many have been the claims of innovation and novelty addressed to Baudelaire over the last century and a half, occasionally very similar in tone and content yet dissimilar in the label attached to his poetry, such as 'modernity' and 'Decadence'. But if we analyse Baudelaire's work synchronically, we can see that in French literary history Baudelaire is at the crossroads between different tendencies. Aside from the many Romantic traits of his poetry, Baudelaire's conventional prosody and traditional versification in the *Fleurs* seem to endanger any statement of poetic modernity. In the letter written to Paul Demeny on 15 May 1871, known as 'Lettre du voyant', after implicitly acknowledging Baudelaire's influence in his search for a modern and innovative poetics that could contain, by means of a synaesthetic practice, 'tout, parfums, sons, couleurs'<sup>68</sup> – in the notorious poem 'Correspondances' Baudelaire had written 'Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent' (OC I, p. 11, l. 8) – Arthur Rimbaud summarises the contrast between Baudelaire's modern elements and the classicism of his poetic forms. Rimbaud writes: 'Baudelaire est le premier voyant, roi des poètes, *un vrai Dieu*. Encore a-t-il vécu dans un milieu trop artiste; et la forme si vantée en lui est mesquine: les inventions d'inconnu réclament des formes nouvelles'.<sup>69</sup> Innovation and conventionality: these are the paradoxical qualities of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, which make Baudelaire, together with the Scapigliati, a veritable *writer of transition*.

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<sup>67</sup> *Seeing Double: Baudelaire's Modernity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 6.

<sup>68</sup> *Œuvres Complètes*, ed. by André Guyaux (Paris: Gallimard, 'Bibliothèque de la Pléiade', 2009), p. 346.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 348.

And yet Baudelaire experimented with innovative poetic forms as well. Of his prose poems, gathered in 1869 in the posthumous collection *Le Spleen de Paris*, twenty appeared together for the first time in 1862 in *La Presse* under the title *Petits Poèmes en prose*, although some of them had already been published since 1855.<sup>70</sup> In this study, however, I focus almost exclusively on Baudelaire's poetry in verse, and there is a specific reason for this. As we shall see, the admiration that the poets of Scapigliatura showed for Baudelaire in the 1860s was, first and foremost, for the poems of the *Fleurs* – followed by his translations of Edgar Allan Poe's short stories and novellas – which they treat as a veritable source of poetic material. Even though there have been attempts to establish some sort of connection between Baudelaire's *Petits Poèmes en prose* and Scapigliatura's poetry,<sup>71</sup> we have to conclude that, in actuality, the Scapigliati do not appear to show much interest for the modernity of poetic forms displayed in the *Spleen de Paris*, in spite of their own formal and stylistic experimentation. As Carolina Nutini has recently demonstrated, in Italy the first demonstrations of interest for Baudelaire's *Spleen de Paris* date around the end of the 1870s, when some ingenious writers, including the 'Scapigliato' novelist Carlo Dossi, start to publicly express and privately note their appreciation for Baudelaire's prose poems, experimenting themselves with this new genre.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> See Pichois, pp. 1293-1307.

<sup>71</sup> See Arnaldo Di Benedetto, "'Case nuove' o le rovine di Milano', in *Arrigo Boito*, ed. by Giovanni Morelli (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1994), p. 32.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. *Tra sperimentalismo scapigliato ed espressivismo primonovecentesco: poemetto in prosa, prosa lirica e frammento* (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2012), pp. 86-88.

### 3. Baudelaire, Father of ‘Realismo Scapigliato’?

The French Romantic movement conventionally finished with the 1848 *Révolution de février*, and the 1850s saw the birth of new tendencies in literature and visual arts. One of those trends was the so-called ‘réalisme’, a term that had been at first utilised by art critics to put under sharp criticism Gustave Courbet’s realistic depiction of contemporary subjects, and was subsequently embraced positively by the latter and by the writer Champfleury, who defined the principles of the *école réaliste* in his various writings, such as the collection *Le Réalisme* (1857), and in some articles published in the short-lived periodical *Le Réalisme* (1856-57). Baudelaire frequented realist milieus in the 1850s, and came to be included by some critics in the *école réaliste*. He was a good friend of Champfleury, Gustave Courbet, Nadar, and, as Gautier claimed in his preface to the *Fleurs*, Baudelaire ‘se laissa un peu aller à ces avances [de l’école réaliste]’, visiting ‘les ateliers réalistes’.<sup>73</sup> Courbet painted Baudelaire’s *Portrait* (1847-48) and featured him in the *Hommage à Delacroix* (1864), which Edmond de Goncourt defined as ‘une apothéose réaliste de Baudelaire’.<sup>74</sup> As André Guyaux asserts, quoting a public adversary of realism, Charles de Montalembert, ‘*Les Fleurs du mal* passaient, dans certains milieux, pour la “dernière production du réalisme”’.<sup>75</sup> There is indeed a side of Baudelaire’s poetry that can be easily associated with Champfleury and Courbet’s ‘réalisme’: the Bohemian, compassionate, and societal (and indeed socialist) atmosphere of such poems as those of the section of the *Fleurs* entitled ‘Le Vin’, which focus on the depiction of the lower classes and of the life of the underdogs, and highlight the

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<sup>73</sup> Baudelaire, p. 91.

<sup>74</sup> *Journal des Goncourt: mémoires de la vie littéraire*, 9 vols (Paris: Bibliothèque-Charpentier, 1891), V, 29.

<sup>75</sup> ‘Préface’, in *Baudelaire: un demi-siècle de lectures des ‘Fleurs du mal’ (1855-1905)*, ed. by André Guyaux (Paris: PUPS, 2007), p. 35.

comforting properties of wine and intoxication (see Chapter II.1.7). In 1852, the photographer Nadar already emphasised the realistic aspects of Baudelaire's poetry, and its contradictory properties, by describing Baudelaire as 'très réaliste sous des allures paradoxales'.<sup>76</sup> The epithet 'réaliste' remained stuck to Baudelaire for years, although he attempted to detach himself from it from the very beginning: as he reports in the project for an article that was eventually discarded, entitled 'Puisque réalisme il y a', 'on m'a dit qu'on m'avait fait l'honneur.....bien que je me sois toujours appliqué à le démentir' (OC II, p. 58).

It is easy to understand why Baudelaire did not want to associate his work with the label *realism*. In 1850s France, the adjective 'réaliste' and the noun 'réalisme' were largely pejorative terms used to indicate the vulgarity and immorality of a work of art.<sup>77</sup> they were still principally employed by critics and journalists (and magistrates) as a denigrating term related to contemporary subjects often belonging to the working class and the rustic world, or to scenes of sexual nature, debauchery, and corruption, rather than as referring to a school, or a movement, or even a set of artistic or literary techniques. As a matter of fact, in August of 1857, six erotic poems of the *Fleurs* were condemned and censured for 'réalisme grossier et offensant pour la pudeur'.<sup>78</sup> This judgement aimed at describing Baudelaire's offense to public morality, instead of implying any relations to any *écoles*. In his review of the *Fleurs* published in the *Journal de Bruxelles* on 15 July 1857, and signed Z. Z. Z., the conservative (and devout Catholic) critic Armand de Pontmartin harshly criticised Baudelaire's poetry, in particular '*Une charogne*, qui

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<sup>76</sup> Quoted by Guyaux, p. 32.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Luc Herman, *Concepts of Realism* (Columbia: Camden House, 1996), pp. 14-15.

<sup>78</sup> Judgement of the 6<sup>e</sup> *Chambre de Police Correctionnelle du Tribunal de la Seine*, *La Gazette des tribunaux*, no. 9483, 21 August 1857, p. 829, repr. in *Baudelaire: un demi-siècle*, ed. by André Guyaux, p. 247.

dépasse tous les chefs-d'œuvre du genre', describing it as 'littérature de charnier, d'abattoir et de mauvais lieu' and associating it with ideas of 'décadence' and 'orgie'.<sup>79</sup> In a letter to Nadar of 14 May 1859, Baudelaire himself lamented the fact that the latter, by creating a caricature of him alongside the carcass of an animal, was making of him the 'Prince des Charognes' (Corr. I, p. 573). This poem had gained much publicity in literary circles, inasmuch as in 1861 Charles Valette affirmed that 'Tout le monde connaît sa trop célèbre pièce intitulée: *Une charogne*', and in 1859 Alphonse Duchesne considered Baudelaire as the inventor of the 'littérature charogne'.<sup>80</sup>

The accusations of realism, vulgarity, and obscenity were not only directed against Baudelaire. In March 1857, Baudelaire's translations of Poe's *Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires* were published, a few months before the *Fleurs*. Once again, de Pontmartin wrote a condemnatory article against Baudelaire, considering 'Beaudelaire' [*sic*] and Poe as adepts of the 'école' of 'décadence', the main characteristics of which were 'le réalisme et la bohème'.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, in August 1857 in the journal *Le Correspondant* an anonymous critic denounced the representations of moral and physical ugliness in the *Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires*, criticising Poe's 'génie matérialiste' and 'réalisme'.<sup>82</sup>

Baudelaire was certainly aware of these accusations, hence his mistrust and refutation of the term 'réalisme' as reproachfully employed by criticism. Baudelaire, however, in his 1855 unpublished essay 'Puisque réalisme il y a' attempted to

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<sup>79</sup> 'Cette littérature de charnier...', repr. in *Baudelaire: un demi-siècle*, ed. by André Guyaux, p. 174.

<sup>80</sup> As reported by Guyaux, pp. 44-45.

<sup>81</sup> *Le Spectateur*, 19 September 1857, repr. in *Œuvres complètes de Charles Baudelaire*, ed. by Jacques Crépet, 7 vols (Paris: Conard, 1933), VII, *Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires par Edgar Poe*, p. 315.

<sup>82</sup> *Le Correspondant*, August 1857, repr. in *Œuvres complètes de Charles Baudelaire*, ed. by Jacques Crépet, VII, p. 314.

cleanse the term ‘réalisme’ from its negative contemporary meanings (as he would do in 1857 for the term ‘décadence’, as we shall see in Chapter I.1.3), giving his own definition focused, significantly, on a specific oxymoronic connotation. Baudelaire affirms that ‘Tout bon poète fut toujours *réaliste*’, by means of sincerity and of the ‘Équation entre l’impression et l’expression’ (OC II, p. 58). He then distances himself from Champfleury’s idea of realism as ‘villageois, grossier, et même rustre, malhonnête’, by claiming that poetry ‘est ce qu’il y a de plus réel, c’est ce qui n’est complètement vrai que dans *un autre monde*’ (OC II, pp. 58-59). Baudelaire’s realism opens up to another realm, whether spiritual, moral, metaphysical, emotional, or simply aesthetic it is not specified; most importantly, it is not solely linked to the mimetic representation of the modern world. Yet there is, clearly, a strong realistic component in Baudelaire. ‘Le “réalisme” de Champfleury s’attache à la vie plus qu’à la mort, celui de Baudelaire à la mort plutôt qu’à la vie’, stated Guyaux,<sup>83</sup> and as a matter of fact Baudelaire’s most realistic portrayals – which, as it shall be demonstrated, are most of the time aesthetically re-elaborated and ultimately transcended by means of rhetorical devices – are of macabre and morbid scenes. Taking into account the entirety of Baudelaire’s production, we can certainly stress the importance of realistic elements in his poetry; however, we have to conclude, following Guyaux, that ‘Baudelaire n’est certes pas un “réaliste”, mais il n’est aucun sens du réel que sa poésie exclue’,<sup>84</sup> and it is this capacity to incorporate the real in all its shapes and forms and in all its contradictions that, first and foremost, captivated the poets of Scapigliatura since the very beginning of their careers.

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<sup>83</sup> ‘Préface’, p. 44.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.



In a very significant letter sent by Arrigo Boito to his friend, colleague, and fellow Scapigliato Emilio Praga in April 1866,<sup>85</sup> Boito gloomily reports the (false) news of Baudelaire's death. Boito represents Baudelaire as the *chef de file* of 'Realismo', and his death as the miserable death of realism's veritable 'anima' and 'corpo'. It is probable, Boito concludes, that he himself would die now that Baudelaire (and, with him, realism) is deceased. Praga's answer is equally significant: he describes Boito's news as 'un colpo di pugnale', declaring that Baudelaire was a 'Povera grand'anima' whom he loved 'come una amante', before telling Boito: 'Prepariamoci a seguirlo. Per me, avrò poche miglia da fare', and ultimately suggesting they drown together in the wake of Baudelaire's death.<sup>86</sup> Certainly, the hyperbolic (and figurative?) language was probably due to the sorrowful and tragic news of the death of one of their principal poetic models; we have to take into account, however, that since 1864 they, as co-editors of the periodical *Figaro*, had made 'Realismo' the emblem of their artistic revolution. In the 1864 article 'Polemica letteraria', considered one of the two manifestos of Scapigliatura's poetry,<sup>87</sup> Boito and Praga define their idea of art as 'un'arte malata, vaneggiante, al dire di molti, un'arte di decadenza, di barocchismo, di razionalismo, di *realismo* ed ecco finalmente la parola sputata' (OL, p. 329). As we have seen with the reviews of Baudelaire's poetry in France in the late 1850s and beginning of the 1860s, where terms related to illness, decadence, and realism were largely employed, Boito and Praga describe their art as 'malata', 'di decadenza', 'di *realismo*'. Yet

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<sup>85</sup> This letter shall be analysed more thoroughly in Chapter I.1.1. The letter is quoted by Piero Nardi, *Vita di Arrigo Boito* (Verona: Mondadori, 1942), p. 349.

<sup>86</sup> See also Chapter II.1.6. The epistle is reproduced by Nardi, *Vita di Arrigo Boito*, p. 350.

<sup>87</sup> See Angela Ida Villa, 'Introduzione', in OL, p. 7.

these three terms coexist, almost oxymoronically (and indeed paradoxically),<sup>88</sup> with such expressions as ‘vaneggiante’ and ‘barocchismo’, which stress a tendency towards wonder and dazzle characteristic of the Italian Baroque, as well as towards the imaginary, the bizarre, and the fantastic of a metaphorical delirium. In fact, in what can be considered the second manifesto of Scapigliatura’s poetry,<sup>89</sup> namely the letter Boito sent to Cletto Arrighi as introduction to the poem ‘Ballatella’ (1865), Boito states the preference that the group of ‘scapigliati romantici in ira’ (including Boito, Praga, and Camerana) had for the ‘fantasticherie’ (OL, p. 11). The amalgamation of tendencies as different as realism and Romanticism in the definition of Scapigliatura’s new art certainly appears implausible, at first glance. We have to consider, however, that:

le terme flou de “réalisme”, lorsqu’il se généralise au milieu du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, porte sur le choix des sujets et non sur la manière de voir ou de décrire le réel. Il n’y a pas vraiment d’opposition entre la fantaisie post-romantique et le réalisme naissant. C’est une même mise en scène d’excentriques ou de marginaux, une même esthétique moderne anti-bourgeoise.<sup>90</sup>

I believe that Boito, Praga, and Camerana interpreted realism in the above signification, as a choice of determined subjects that were traditionally not treated by poetry (such as fetuses, corpses, scenes of debauchery, and so forth) and as a display of an anti-bourgeois lifestyle, which could also be called ‘Bohème’, and can easily find illustration in Baudelaire’s *Fleurs*. In this work I shall demonstrate that Baudelaire is a central figure in the Scapigliati’s treatment of the Bohemian image of the (often poor) poet working in an industrial and profoundly antagonistic bourgeois

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<sup>88</sup> For an examination of the oxymoronic properties of Scapigliatura’s – and especially Boito’s – poetry, as well as of the so-called ‘Realismo’, see Chapter I.

<sup>89</sup> See Villa, p. 10.

<sup>90</sup> Sandrine Berthelot, ‘Bohème et fantaisie chez Murger’, in *La Fantaisie post-romantique*, ed. by Jean-Louis Cabanès and Jean-Pierre Saïdah (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2003), p. 209.

society, even since their first poems such as those included in Praga's collection *Tavolozza* (1862). Although the practical application of 'Realismo', eventually, would not be exactly the same in Boito, Praga, and Camerana, their theoretical notion and ideal function of the term can be summarised by means of Folco Portinari's definition of realism as 'un processo desublimativo degli oggetti tradizionalmente sublimati', and a 'demitizzazione dei *topoi* assimilati nella tradizione e quindi [...] un recupero degli oggetti genericamente ritenuti inadeguati e rifiutati'.<sup>91</sup> Taking into account this connotation of realism, it is plain why the Scapigliati chose Baudelaire as the true father of realism and their ultimate poetic model: as Portinari affirms, 'Nelle *Fleurs* la realtà, quella proprio "impoetica" e "impropria", avanza la sua rivendicazione, ottiene un posto e lo consolida in direzioni le più divergenti o onnicomprensive [...] sublimando anzi semmai l'"impoetico" e l'"improprio"'.<sup>92</sup>

Starting from the 1870s, in the Italian journalistic scene revolving around Scapigliatura Baudelaire's name was progressively associated not only with realism and the *Bohème*, but with such terms as *Verismo* and *Naturalismo* as well, together with the names of the main exponents of these literary tendencies, in particular Émile Zola. Baudelaire could, then, still appear as the 'most Bohemian of all' ('Boemo dei Boemi') in 1880,<sup>93</sup> and in 1875 Felice Cameroni could list the *Fleurs* as his favourite poetic work of realism, increasingly associated with Zola's Naturalism: 'In letteratura drammatica, il mio ideale è il *Demi-Monde*, nel romanzo *La Curée*, in

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<sup>91</sup> *Un'idea di realismo* (Naples: Guida, 1976), p. 10.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>93</sup> Psiche, 'Une matinée chez Baudelaire', *La Farfalla*, 5 September 1880, repr. in *La pubblicistica nel periodo della Scapigliatura*, ed. by Giuseppe Farinelli, p. 391.

poesia *Les fleurs du mal*, in filosofia le opera di Büchner'.<sup>94</sup> But Cameroni and many others writing for the periodicals *Gazzettino Rosa*, *Il Sole*, and *La Plebe* in the 1870s were very active advocates of what has been considered the 'Scapigliatura democratica', that is to say as the most political and social division of the movement which developed in the 1870s and was very close to the first productions of Verismo. If, undoubtedly, the 'Scapigliatura democratica' of the 1870s had some connections to the 'Scapigliatura letteraria' of the 1860s, at the same time it appropriated and took to the extremes (politically and literarily) certain realistic features of the writers of the 1860s, especially Emilio Praga's. In this study, I will focus exclusively on the poets of the first phase of Scapigliatura that, in terms of poetic works, possesses a well-defined historical place within the nineteenth-century literary scene.

#### **4. Baudelaire and Scapigliatura: Aims of Research**

The subject of this work is Baudelaire's influence on the major poets of Scapigliatura: Boito, Praga, and Camerana. Apart from investigating the Baudelairism of the individual authors, I aim to establish if they constituted a proper 'Baudelairian school' that tried to open new paths for Italian poetry and, if so, to what extent. Several other writers revolved around the three authors considered here: Gaetano Leonello Patuzzi, Bernardino Zendrini, Vittorio Betteloni and, later, Luigi Gualdo, to name only a few, while sharing similar artistic principles with Boito, Praga, and Camerana, had relationships with the latter full of misunderstandings and disagreements over the direction to take, and in particular over the nature of

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<sup>94</sup> 'Teatri e libri', *L'Arte Drammatica*, 14 August 1875, p. 2.

‘Realismo’.<sup>95</sup> In the 1860s, Boito, Praga, and Camerana exchanged letters, dedicated poems to each other in which they expressed a communality of poetic ideals,<sup>96</sup> and deeply influenced each other. It could be argued that also Iginio Ugo Tarchetti, another key figure in Scapigliatura, should be included in this study: after all, his poems, which started to appear in periodicals in 1867 and would be gathered after his death in the volume *Disjecta* (1879), can be easily compared, in tone, structure, and images, to Boito, Praga, and even Camerana.<sup>97</sup> Tarchetti, however, was primarily a novelist and a writer of short stories and novellas. He was much more influential and innovative in fiction than in poetry, and even though he was surely acquainted with Praga, Boito, and Camerana,<sup>98</sup> the name of these three poets ‘non spunta mai a proposito dell’autore di *Fosca* [Tarchetti], né per quel che riguarda la sua opera, né per quel che tocca la sua biografia: si tratta di due mondi estranei o per lo meno lontani’; Tarchetti remains ‘lontano da Boito e da Praga [...], in una pattuglia di seconda linea’.<sup>99</sup> Some of Tarchetti’s works shall still be considered in this study, particularly as a method of comparison to the other Scapigliati.

The main focus of this thesis is on the major works that have made Scapigliatura’s poetic history and that are strictly related to the authors’ phase in Scapigliatura in the 1860s. Accordingly, I will examine the following primary sources: Boito’s *Il libro dei versi* (first published in 1877 but only including poems written throughout the 1860s) and *Re Orso* (1864); Praga’s *Tavolozza* (1862) and *Penombre* (1864); and Camerana’s poems written between 1863 and 1869. When

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<sup>95</sup> Cf. Villa, pp. 21-30.

<sup>96</sup> See Boito’s ‘A Emilio Praga’ and ‘A Giovanni Camerana’; Praga’s ‘All’amico’, ‘Versi scritti in un giorno buio’, ‘Monaci e cavalieri’, dedicated to Boito, and the collection *Fiabe e leggende*, dedicated to Camerana; Camerana’s ‘A Emilio Praga’ and ‘Ad Arrigo Boito’.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. Mariani, pp. 369-374.

<sup>98</sup> See Praga’s poem ‘Sulla tomba di I.U. Tarchetti’ (PP, pp. 306-307), written in September 1871 and posthumously published in *Trasparenze*.

<sup>99</sup> Mariani, pp. 37, 40-41.

later (or non-poetic) works are deemed significant for my analysis, especially when tracing a poet's poetic development, these are given a well-defined place within the study. That is why I shall analyse also sections and poems taken from Praga's *Fiabe e leggende* (1869), which is generally considered as entirely detached from Praga's Scapigliatura sensibility as displayed in the first two collections,<sup>100</sup> as well as from Praga's posthumous *Trasparenze* (1878), Boito's operas *Mefistofele* (1868; 1875 2nd version) and *Nerone* (uncompleted; libretto published in 1901), and, finally, Camerana's post-1869 poems.

The investigation of Baudelaire's influence on the Scapigliati will be conducted both individually – searching for Baudelairian features in their work – and comparatively, contrasting differences and aiming to locate similarities. On a methodological level, I shall analyse the material from two different yet complementary points of view: on the one hand, I examine the textual, lexical, and stylistic borrowings, juxtaposing them to the source text and establishing their significance and role within the individual poem; on the other hand, I focus on the appropriation of Baudelairian material on a deeper level, which entails the extrapolation, adaptation, and personal re-elaboration of this material into the various themes and topics that have been deemed as characteristic of Scapigliatura poetry. Exploring elements of Baudelaire's poetics in these authors implies taking into account the different aspects of Baudelaire's and Scapigliatura's work, their status of *in-betweenness*, and their links to Romanticism as well as to a nascent Decadent sensibility. Following Gioanola, Weir, Desmarais and Baldick, Decadence denotes the post-Romantic crisis caused by the loss of traditional religious, literary, and

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<sup>100</sup> *Fiabe e leggende* has been commonly deemed an 'involuzione' with which 'Praga mutò registro' and 'riguadagnò il genere romantico'. Farinelli, *La Scapigliatura*, p. 125.

patriotic values, whose main features are the protest against the modern world and modern society and, strictly related to this, a poetics of *interiority*, with all the relative images and techniques. In this work I approach Baudelaire's stylistic and thematic influence on Scapigliatura from two angles: 1) I assess the elements of French Romanticism that became part of the poetics of Scapigliatura through Baudelaire's mediation; 2) I analyse the modern poetic features that the Scapigliati adopted from Baudelaire. Modernity is, after all, strongly connected to the notion of decadence in a literary and artistic context. In my research I attempt an investigation of the *modernity* of Scapigliatura, considering this expression both in Baudelairian terms as the capacity to treat literarily the aesthetic and moral subjects of contemporary life, conveying the poet's own sensibility in the process, and as variously interpreted by scholarship (Benjamin, Labarthe, Culler, Meltzer, and Ward) as evidence of poetic novelty that involves a direct relationship with the modern world and modern life.

The first chapter of this thesis, “‘Quand j'étais jeune et Baudelairien’: Arrigo Boito and Baudelaire's Lesson’, is dedicated to the study of the several types of irregularity present in Boito's *Il libro dei versi* and to the poetics of excess displayed in *Re Orso*. Boito was the true theorist of the poetry of Scapigliatura, which is why in the opening chapter I discuss his poetic and critical works. In the first section, from the examination of poetic forms, rhetorical devices, and language that represent the paradoxes and ironies of modern times – which also involves a thorough explanation of Boito's idea of ‘Realismo’ – I shall move on to Boito's treatment of irregular and deformed figures of contemporaneity, such as maimed statues and mutilated corpses, analysing their significations and determining if they find a precise antecedent in

Baudelaire. The second section examines the dark and macabre fairy tale *Re Orso*, whereby Boito focuses on the idea of Satanic and animalistic excess. I shall investigate Boito's use of allegory to depict a depraved world characterised by the various shades of sin and of moral and physical corruption: ennui, remorse, intoxication and overconsumption, sadism, decomposition, and sexual perversion, comparing it to Baudelaire's own portrayal of vice and decay by means of allegories of excess.

In the second chapter, 'Emilio Praga, Reader of the *Fleurs du Mal*: For a Redefinition of Praga's Baudelairism', we shall examine Praga's poetic development from *Tavolozza* to *Penombre*. First of all, the canonical reading of *Tavolozza*, generally considered as an example of Praga's early poetic stage sharing very little with Baudelaire's poetry, will be questioned, establishing whether Praga's Baudelairism in his first collection really amounts to an immature interpretation of Baudelaire's macabre, sensual, and ultimately *maudit* elements, or if, on the contrary, Baudelaire's influence is already very much felt and involves disparate features, even some that have been commonly conceived as far from Baudelaire's own sensibility. Secondly, we shall discuss *Penombre*, which is typically described as Praga's most Baudelairian work. Starting from the critical examination of the existing scholarship on *Penombre*, we will then establish if Baudelaire's presence in the first section 'Meriggi', which is deemed to be closer to the idyllic atmosphere of *Tavolozza* than to the succeeding darker sections, is more profound than formerly thought, in particular as regards elements belonging to the idealistic pole of Praga's poetry, involving images of winter seclusion and, strictly related to this, subjective introspection. Subsequently, we shall analyse the role of the morbid and hideous



images that constitute the poem ‘A un feto’, a veritable polemic against both modern science and religion, also examining Praga’s attempts at opposing the powers of sublimation of nature to the dejected scenes. Finally, we will move on to the search for a subjective and relative idea of beauty in *Penombre*, which entails a more intimate approach to nature and natural objects that serve as analogies to the poet’s sensations and sensory perceptions, related to aesthetic portrayals as different as the representation of Platonic love and the depiction of vice and physical debauchery, and often expressed by means of synaesthesia employed as rhetorical device.

In the third and last chapter, ‘Cultivating Indefiniteness: Baudelaire’s Role in Giovanni Camerana’s “Scapigliatura” Years’, we trace Camerana’s evolution from the fundamentally Romantic poetics of ‘Natura e pensiero’ to the poems of Scapigliatura of the years 1864-1869. From the study of the possible Baudelairean sources of ‘Natura e pensiero’, including Baudelaire’s most Romantic and Bohemian poems, such as ‘Bénédiction’, in the attempt to establish if Baudelaire is already an important presence in the early Camerana, we approach the latter’s use of Baudelairean analogical techniques as displayed in the poem ‘Correspondances’. We shall see that, at the time of Scapigliatura, Camerana employs the Baudelairean analogy mainly to compare natural landscapes and the physical or moral features of the feminine subject. Lastly, we shall investigate Camerana’s ‘visions of modernity’, which share some characteristics with Boito’s and Praga’s intermingling of sacredness and sensuality, purity and eroticism with the aim of shocking the reader, depicting a comprehensive reality and, concurrently, conveying the poet’s contrasting feelings of mystical worship and sexual attraction for the female figure. However, some of Camerana’s ‘visions’ have unique links to the *Fleurs*, including: a

morbid fascination for death in the form of dreams of sepulchres and cemeteries, which go far beyond the interest for a macabre imagery shown by the other Scapigliati; figures of speech, in particular allegory, that serve to express the fragmentation of the self in the modern world, with natural landscapes, and its singular components (such as wind, fog, and trees), that symbolise the poet's gloomy mood and spleen.

Baudelaire's influence on Scapigliatura has already been studied, insofar as Adelaida Sozzi Casanova stated that 'Lo scrittore che più influenzò la Scapigliatura fu Baudelaire; una influenza che varcò i limiti letterari e si estese al costume di vita'.<sup>101</sup> Studies on the relationship between the poetry of Scapigliatura and Baudelaire, however, have been generally undertaken within essays dedicated to the individual authors, and have not focused on drawing a detailed and systematic picture that portrays the connections not only between Baudelaire and the poets of Scapigliatura, but also among the Scapigliati themselves. Furthermore, these analyses have commonly taken into account only the most explicit and superficial Baudelairian aspects of Scapigliatura's poetry, such as the notion of aesthetic revolt against a conventional idea of beauty, which led the Scapigliati to introduce into their poetry morally shocking and unconventional subjects, a practice commonly deemed 'maledettismo scapigliato', as we shall see. And yet Baudelaire's poetry possesses many levels of meaning and, most notably, many links to a past tradition in terms of prosody, images, themes, and even language: Baudelaire's image cannot be restricted, as Antoine Compagnon has attentively shown, to one of the labels that have been attached to him in the past century, such as Baudelaire 'réaliste',

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<sup>101</sup> *La Scapigliatura* (Milan: Cooperativa libraria i.u.l.m., 1979), p. 24.

‘décadent’, ‘classique’, ‘moderne’, and so forth.<sup>102</sup> Baudelaire, occasionally inconsistent, contradictory, and paradoxical, is one and all of these personas at the same time – depending on the poem – and one must surely take this into account when approaching Baudelaire’s influence over other authors.

In the years after the publication of the second edition of the *Fleurs*, Baudelaire was acclaimed in France as a master by groups of young admirers, among them Verlaine and Stéphane Mallarmé, who helped to develop a Decadent ‘baudelaïrisme’ founded on certain characteristics of Baudelaire’s poetics, which would then become the basis of the Decadent and Symbolist aesthetics. However, while Baudelaire’s influence on French poetry has been well documented, the study of the impact he had on Italian literature in the decade after the first release of the *Fleurs* has not been equally exhaustive, solely scratching the surface of the relationship between Baudelaire and the poetry of Scapigliatura, a movement that has played a pivotal role in the transition from Italian Romanticism to Decadentism and whose avant-gardist experimentation, as some scholarship has started to recognise,<sup>103</sup> has paved the way for the twentieth-century historical avant-gardes. As a result, the true extent of Baudelaire’s influence on Scapigliatura has not been acknowledged. This study, quite simply, strives to fill the gaps in the existing scholarship, also offering a fresh outlook of Scapigliatura’s poetic modernity and pointing to new

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<sup>102</sup> *Baudelaire devant l’innombrable* (Paris: Presses de l’Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2003), pp. 9-39.

<sup>103</sup> See, for instance, the volume edited by Roberto Tessari *La Scapigliatura: un’avanguardia artistica nella società industriale* (Turin: Paravia, 1975) and Gianni Grana’s *Le avanguardie letterarie: cultura e politica, scienza e arte dalla Scapigliatura alla Neo-avanguardia attraverso il Fascismo*, 3 vols (Milan: Marzorati, 1986), I. In regard to Scapigliatura’s legacy in Futurism, see Selena Daly’s *From the Scapigliatura to Futurism: Arrigo Boito and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University College Dublin, 2010), as well as her essay ‘Arrigo Boito e Filippo Tommaso Marinetti tra il Reale e l’Ideale’, *Otto/Novecento*, 36, no. 3 (Sep/Dec 2012), 191-201.

directions in the investigation of Baudelaire's crucial role in the evolution of mid- to late-nineteenth-century European literature.



## CHAPTER I

### **‘Quand j’étais jeune et Baudelairien’: Arrigo Boito and Baudelaire’s Lesson**

#### ***1. Irregularity and Modernity in ‘Il libro dei versi’***

##### **1.1 Stylistic Irregularities: Oxymora and Juxtapositions in Boito’s ‘Realismo’**

In the past century, many an adjective has been used by scholars to describe the writer, composer, and librettist Arrigo Boito, among which one of the most colourful is certainly the military term ‘transfuga’,<sup>1</sup> translatable into English as *defector*. This adjective is now frequently employed when discussing Boito’s departure from the milieu of Scapigliatura, which according to Villa occurred ‘ancor prima del secondo *Mefistofele* (1875) e già dai primissimi anni Settanta’,<sup>2</sup> hence even before Praga’s death in December 1875. This is, however, only partially accurate: Boito’s interest in his own poems written during the 1860s, most of which had already been published in various journals, continued throughout his life, inasmuch as he gathered these poems in *Il libro dei versi*. This is Boito’s only collection of poetry, published for the first time in 1877 and subsequently in 1902 with some variants.

After his Scapigliatura period, Boito received many honours and awards particularly for the second version of his opera *Mefistofele*, for which he composed both the music and the libretto, as well as for his work as librettist for other composers, such as for Giuseppe Verdi’s *Otello* (1887) and *Falstaff* (1893). At the beginning of the twentieth century, Boito had become one of the most important personalities in Italian culture. During that time, Boito occasionally recalled his

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<sup>1</sup> Mariani, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Introduzione’, p. 36.

youthful years with Scapigliatura in his correspondence with his dearest friends, as in the missive sent to the musicologist Camille Bellaigue in March 1908. Before describing a brief experience with drugs, Boito affirms:

Quand j'étais jeune et Baudelairien, j'avais dressé mes nerfs aux joies du haschisch.<sup>3</sup>

Boito describes himself in his youth, during the phase in Scapigliatura, as *Baudelairian*. Another document delineates more clearly what he might mean with the expression 'Baudelairien', namely the epistle that a young Boito sent to Praga in April 1866. Boito reports the news on Baudelaire's death, which later would be proven false, in the following manner:

Caro Emilio.

Non vedremo più Baudelaire. Ti mando la funebre notizia che ho letta con tetra commozione in questo momento.

Il Realismo muore, fratello, muore nella doppia morte dell'anima e del corpo. I realisti agonizzano senza prete al capezzale e vanno senza gloria.

Praga, come stai?

Tastiamoci il polso scambievolmente e, se batte ancora, Dio e Victor Hugo ci aiutino!

J'ai plus de souvenirs que si j'avais mille ans!

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What is evident in this passionate letter is a double devotion: firstly towards Baudelaire, who is considered here as the foremost advocate of a literary tendency described as 'Realismo', insofar as this trend could not survive after the death of the 'realist' Baudelaire; and secondly towards this very same 'Realismo'. It is thus safe to say that with the adjective 'Baudelairien', which he utilises to describe his youthful years with Scapigliatura in the missive to Bellaigue, Boito means *realist*.

Certainly Boito was not the first to describe Baudelaire as a 'realist'. In the

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<sup>3</sup> Letter quoted by Nardi, *Vita di Arrigo Boito*, p. 229.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 349.

Introduction, we saw that in August 1857 the 6<sup>e</sup> *Chambre Correctionnelle* condemned six erotic poems of the *Fleurs du Mal*, speaking of crude and offensive realism. With the term ‘Realismo’, however, Boito does not intend to describe the lyrical treatment of offensive and obscene material, or at least not only. As he explains in the article ‘Polemica letteraria’, realists must indeed take into account the most disgusting facets of reality, but they also must not forget to portray its positive aspects. The ‘Polemica letteraria’ can be seen as the first of two veritable manifestos of the poetry of Scapigliatura, and it was published in the Milanese journal *Figaro* in February 1864. Boito, who most likely co-authored the article together with Praga, describes Scapigliatura as follows:<sup>5</sup>

E sarà un’arte malata, vaneggiante, al dire di molti, un’arte di decadenza, di barocchismo, di razionalismo, di *realismo* ed ecco finalmente la parola sputata. [...] Realismo! [...] E tanto sgomento in questa parola! Questi idealisti candidi e beati devono avere una assai triste idea di ciò che di reale v’ha sulla terra per schifarsene tanto (eppure v’hanno delle dolci realtà). (OL, pp. 329-330)

In this section of the ‘Polemica letteraria’ it is possible to notice one of the stylistic techniques preferred by Boito, that is to say the oxymoronic juxtaposition of two concepts: the ‘*realismo*’ of Scapigliatura has to represent the real in its entirety, and not only the negative and unpleasant elements that would certainly be well-depicted by an art considered as ‘ill’ and ‘decadent’. Boito also takes into account the ‘dolci realtà’, in an attempt to merge the contrasting aspects of reality into a single art. This vision of dualistic reality is also present in the letter concerning Baudelaire’s death that Boito sent to Praga. The whole epistle is a veritable homage to Baudelaire: the use of the oxymoron to express a contrasting emotion, difficult to categorise (‘tetra

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<sup>5</sup> The article is signed by ‘La Direzione’, and the *Figaro* was mainly co-edited by Boito and Praga. Recent studies tend to consider the ‘Polemica letteraria’ as being written primarily by Boito. Cf. Villa, p. 23.



commozione'); the description of the death of realism in dualistic terms ('doppia morte dell'anima e del corpo'); the concluding sentence, 'J'ai plus de souvenirs que si j'avais mille ans!' taken from a poem of the *Fleurs*, namely 'Spleen' (LXXVI), which discusses the torment caused by spleen and ennui.

Baudelaire influenced Boito's dualistic and oxymoronic theories both stylistically and thematically. As we read in the introduction to Charles Asselineau's *La Double vie*, published in 1858, since childhood Baudelaire deemed himself a 'homo duplex [...] toujours double, action et intention, rêve et réalité; toujours l'un nuisant à l'autre, l'un usurpant la part de l'autre' (*La Double vie*, par Charles Asselineau', OC II, p. 87). He considered reality to be ambiguous and ambivalent, as we can understand from the section titled 'Spleen et Idéal' in the *Fleurs du Mal*; in his compositions, the subjects have in most cases contradictory features, and his poetics has been described as 'oxymoronic' by many a scholar.<sup>6</sup> In the third of his 'Projets de préfaces', Baudelaire himself explains the use of the oxymoron in the *Fleurs* as follows:

la poésie se rattache aux arts de la peinture, de la cuisine et du cosmétique par la possibilité d'exprimer toute sensation de suavité ou d'amertume, de béatitude ou d'horreur, par l'accouplement de tel substantif avec tel adjectif, analogue ou contraire.<sup>7</sup> (OC I, p. 183)

The oxymoron is one of Baudelaire's preferred figures of speech. It is employed throughout his work, as part of titles of collections (*Les Fleurs du Mal*) or poems ('Horreur sympathique'), as well as in passages of compositions such as 'Tu mettrais

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<sup>6</sup> See, among others, Léon Cellier, 'D'une rhétorique profonde: Baudelaire et l'oxymoron', in *Parcours initiatiques* (Neuchâtel: La Baconnière, 1977), pp. 188-201; Carol de Dobay Rifelj, 'Baudelaire: de quelle boue?', in *Word and Figure: The Language of Nineteenth-Century French Poetry* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1987), pp. 71-72; Labarthe, p. 572.

<sup>7</sup> Noteworthy here is also the unusual association between poetry and cooking, or better the use of a vocabulary related to food in the poetic discourse which, as we shall see in Chapter II.2.3, is a customary trait of Baudelaire's poetry as much as Boito's.

l'univers entier...', where the speaker tries to convey his disgust of the fact that the poet, in spite of being a 'génie' (OC I, p. 28, l. 17), is conceived by the woman, considered as 'reine des péchés' (l. 16): 'Ô fangeuse grandeur! sublime ignominie!' (l. 18). Contemporary reality, in its paradoxical duplicity, could be fully expressed only through the irregularity of the oxymoron, which acquires an ontological value in Baudelaire's work,<sup>8</sup> in his attempt to unite contradictory elements to communicate the ineffable. An example of this can be found in the image of the swan portrayed in 'Le Cygne'. In order to describe the sense of alienation of a swan that has escaped from a cage and is flapping its wings on a dusty pavement of Paris looking for the water of its native lake (OC I, p. 86, ll. 21-22), Baudelaire describes the animal as 'ridicule et sublime', comparing it to exiles from their own countries (l. 35). This last simile reveals the significance that Baudelaire accords to the image of the swan, veritable allegory of exile by means of which the poet expresses his own alienation in mid-nineteenth-century Paris, at a time when the city was being utterly transformed by Baron Haussmann's urban renovations. Another illustration of Baudelaire's attempt to convey the inexpressible is the subject of the poem 'Les Petites vieilles', namely the elderly women that live in the 'vieilles capitales' (OC I, p. 89, l. 1), where 'tout, même l'horreur, tourne aux enchantements' (l. 2). In order to express his fascination for these irregular 'monstres disloqués' (l. 5), the lyrical I describes them as 'décrépits et charmants' (l. 4).

The illogicality of contemporary times and the duality of the human being are also treated by Boito in several poems of the collection *Il libro dei versi*. In 'Dualismo' (OL, pp. 53-55), the speaker describes himself as 'luce ed ombra;

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<sup>8</sup> Labarthe, p. 572.

angelica / Farfalla o verme immondo' (ll. 1-2),<sup>9</sup> and numerous oxymora convey a moral situation otherwise inexpressible, as during his reflections the speaker hears 'La bestemmia dell'angelo' (l. 10) or 'l'umile orazione / Dell'esule dimone / Che riede a Dio, fedel' (ll. 12-14). The lyrical I describes modern life as 'ebete', because he feels simultaneously attracted to and repulsed by it: 'Lenta che pare un secolo, / Breve che pare un'ora' (ll. 99-101); life is a hopeful yet tedious 'rosario / Monotono' formed by suffering gemstones with sparkling tears, 'Dove ogni gemma brilla / Di pianto, acerba stilla / Fatta d'acerbo duol' (ll. 45-48).

Oxymora formed by the juxtaposition of single words or constructs, which bring together opposite ideas such as good/evil, attraction/repulsion, or beauty/ugliness, can be found in 'A una mummia' (OL, pp. 59-61), written in 1862. The main source for this poem is, I would argue, Edgar Allan Poe's satirical short story 'Some Words with a Mummy', translated by Baudelaire as 'Petite discussion avec une momie' along with the other *Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires*, first published in 1857. Together with Carla Apollonio, we can assume that Boito – fluent in French but not as much in English – read Poe's work through Baudelaire's translations, which were very popular at the time,<sup>10</sup> an hypothesis consistent with the volume of the *Histoires extraordinaires* translated by Baudelaire present in Boito's personal library.<sup>11</sup> 'Petite discussion avec une momie' (NHE, pp. 254-275) influenced 'A una mummia' on multiple levels: the aesthetic characterisation of the mummy, whose bandages are peculiarly made of papyrus and not linen (NHE,

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<sup>9</sup> The first two versions of the poem stressed even more the coexistence of the opposites, since there Boito employed the conjunction 'and': 'angelica / Farfalla e verme immondo'. See OL, p. 396.

<sup>10</sup> 'La presenza di E.A. Poe in alcuni scapigliati lombardi', *Otto/Novecento*, 5, no. 1 (Jan/Feb 1981), pp. 110-112.

<sup>11</sup> *Histoires extraordinaires*, trans. by Charles Baudelaire, in Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres Complètes*, 6 vols (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1903), V. The volume owned by Boito is now held in the 'Biblioteca dello studio di Arrigo Boito nel Museo del Conservatorio di musica "A. Boito"', Parma, Italy.

p. 257) in both works; the mummy being ironically given a (possibly wrong) name both in ‘A una mummia’ (‘t’han chiamata a nome’, l. 40) and in ‘Petite discussion avec une momie’ (‘*Allamistakeo*’, NHE, p. 256); the mummy’s feeling of cold (NHE, p. 264), being in a country north of ancient Egypt (Boito writes ‘Nel gel d’un aer piono’, l. 14); the resurrection of the mummy, which if in Poe’s story is the focal point, in Boito’s occurs in the last stanza (ll. 89-96); and, above all, the polemic towards progress and what Boito described as the ‘*Scienza curiosa*’ (l. 24) that stole the mummy from its resting place, which is now at the mercy of ignorant people that misuse (and abuse) the anthropological artefact in the nineteenth century. In the ‘Notes nouvelles sur Edgar Poe’, the preface to the *Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires*, Baudelaire refers to Poe’s mummy while lashing out at progress for having lost what was once considered important knowledge:

je crois que la momie Allamistakeo n’aurait pas manqué de demander, avec le ton doux et discret de la supériorité, si c’était aussi grâce au progrès *incessant*, – à la loi fatale, irrésistible, du progrès, – que ce fameux secret avait été perdu. (OC II, p. 324)

‘A una mummia’ is addressed to a mummy in an 1860s Egyptian museum in Turin, Italy, prisoner of a display cabinet among tourists, scholars, and gluttonous guides that are only interested in its commercial exploitation (l. 46), in a world mockingly called ‘civilised’ (l. 29). Here the estrangement of the anthropological artefact is represented as an ‘eternal corpse’, described by the oxymoron ‘*frate eterno*’ (l. 7); in modern times: locked in a present-day museum, the mummy, born ‘*al sole, al fulgido / Sole del tuo deserto*’ (ll. 9-10), is as alienated as Baudelaire’s swan is in contemporary Paris. The mummy is ‘*fasciata in logori / Papiri sontuösi*’ (ll. 1-2), and the oxymoron between the adjectives ‘*logori*’ and ‘*sontuösi*’ defines an attempt to aesthetically characterise the mummy, to describe its charm. The fourth

stanza introduces a further contradiction in the portrayal of this anthropological artefact. The crowd's disgust is conveyed by the following analogy between 'putrid mud' and the mummy: 'come appar su putrido / Brago una morta bolla / Tu comparisti ai cupidi / Stupori della folla' (ll. 25-28). Yet, in opposition to the previous four lines, the mummy is subsequently considered as a 'beautiful' and 'precious' 'piece of refuse', worthy of display in a museum:

Dal mondo incivilito  
Fosti segnata a dito  
Qual prezioso e pulcro  
Rifiuto del sepolcro. (ll. 29-32)

The juxtaposition between words belonging to different registers, namely between 'Rifiuto', a term of everyday language, and 'pulcro', a noble word, enhances the intensity of this third oxymoron, at least as much as the semantic clash of the rhyme 'pulcro'/'sepolcro' does. Unlike the visitors of the museum who consider the mummy monstrous and ridiculous, since it inspires in them either horror (ll. 49-52) or laughter (ll. 53-54), and who do not treat the anthropological artefact respectfully as a body that was once a living person (ll. 55-56), the poet is sympathetic to the life of the mummy when it was alive and possessed a 'soul':

Eppur chiudesti un'anima  
In quella sorda testa,  
Lo sento, e n'è riverbero  
Quella tua fronte mesta,  
Eppur sentisti il core  
Balzarti per amore,  
Eppur provasti il morso  
Del pianto e del rimorso. (ll. 57-64)

Expressing commiseration – not devoid of a certain ironic tone – towards a grotesque subject only judged by its external appearance, this passage is close to Baudelaire's

compassionate portrayal of the elderly women in ‘Les Petites vieilles’,<sup>12</sup> represented as ‘Débris d’humanité’ (OC I, p. 91, l. 72) and as monstrous yet sensitive beings who still possess ‘souls’: ‘Ces monstres disloqués furent jadis des femmes, / Éponine ou Laïs! Monstres brisés, bossus / Ou tordus, aimons-les! ce sont encor des âmes’ (OC I, p. 89, ll. 5-7). In ‘A una mummia’, oxymora and juxtapositions are employed to describe the paradoxical situation of an ‘eternal’ mummified corpse of a human locked in a nineteenth-century museum, considered at the same time both horrible and charming, and this oxymoronic portrayal itself serves to convey Boito’s own fascination with this ugly poetic subject.

## 1.2 The Aesthetics of Baudelaire’s Modern *beauté* and Boito’s ‘Quasimodi’

Aside from the representation of the duality of the world, the objective of Baudelaire’s oxymora and juxtapositions was to create ‘flowers of evil’, as the title of the collection suggests, that is to verbally transmute the hideous contemporary reality into beauty through poetic art. It has to be considered, in the first instance, that Baudelaire firmly believes that ‘*Le beau est toujours bizarre*. [...] Je dis qu’il contient toujours un peu de bizarrerie, de bizarrerie naïve, non voulue, inconsciente, et que c’est cette bizarrerie qui le fait être particulièrement le Beau’ (‘Exposition universelle, 1855’, OC II, p. 578). He also deems ‘irregularity’ to be part of beauty: ‘Ce qui n’est pas légèrement difforme a l’air insensible; – d’où il suit que l’irrégularité [...] [est] une partie essentielle et la caractéristique de la beauté’ (*Fusées*, OC I, p. 656). The French poet contemplates passion and feelings, even the

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<sup>12</sup> Marcel Proust speaks of Baudelaire’s peculiar writing tone in ‘Les Petites vieilles’ as a ‘pitié qui prend des accents d’ironie’. ‘À propos de Baudelaire’, in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, ed. by Pierre Clarac and Yves Sandre (Paris: Gallimard, ‘Bibliothèque de la Pléiade’, 1971), p. 625.

most terrible ones, as characteristics of beauty, and this as dualistically formed by ‘un élément éternel, invariable [...] et d’un élément relatif, circonstanciel, qui sera [...] l’époque, la mode, la morale, la passion’ (*Le Peintre de la vie moderne*, OC II, p. 685). This definition of beauty derives from the notion of modernity as discussed in the Introduction, in which it was shown that for Baudelaire the aim of the artist must be ‘de dégager de la mode ce qu’elle peut contenir de poétique dans l’historique, de tirer l’éternel du transitoire’. Paris and the various characters of the modern metropolis, with all their aesthetic and moral ugliness, thereby become some of Baudelaire’s favourite subjects, particularly from the 1861 edition of the *Fleurs*, as the section ‘Tableaux parisiens’ demonstrates.

Even though Baudelaire, like Boito, does discuss the opposition between contemporary reality and antiquity in poems such as ‘La Muse malade’ and ‘J’aime le souvenir...’, for the most part his poetic subjects are characters living in present times. The city becomes the expression of modernity with its grotesque and monstrous inhabitants (courtesans, elderly, blind people, and so forth). In addition to representing the duplicity of modern life, the oxymoron becomes the rhetorical figure of the duplicity of beauty that is no longer seen as *absolute* (as in Platonic and idealistic aesthetic theories), but *relative* and *subjective*, thus permitting the poetic transmutation of ugliness into beauty and of the ‘élément relatif’ and transitory present of the contemporary world into eternal art.<sup>13</sup> Baudelaire indeed retained some elements of Platonism in his poetics, such as the notion of spiritual elevation by means of beauty displayed in ‘Élévation’ (OC I, p. 10), which influenced the ‘Prologo in cielo’ of Boito’s *Mefistofele*, as we will see further on, but his conception

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Labarthe, pp. 572-573.

of relative beauty is evident in the opening of ‘Hymne à la Beauté’:

Viens-tu du ciel profond ou sors-tu de l’abîme,  
Ô Beauté? ton regard, infernal et divin,  
Verse confusément le bienfait et le crime,  
Et l’on peut pour cela te comparer au vin. (OC I, p. 24, ll. 1-4)

According to Baudelaire, the road to the ideal passes through the reassembling of the double and mostly contrasting aspects of reality. Nevertheless, despite the capacity of the oxymoron to unite opposites, Baudelaire knows very well that it is not possible to idealise every element of the real, and in some compositions the dualistic structure serves to point out this impossible task. In ‘Une charogne’, which strongly influenced Boito’s ‘Lezione d’anatomia’ and Praga’s ‘A un feto’, for instance, despite Baudelaire’s efforts to transfigure reality, the contrast between the real and the ideal of the various sections is resolved in a demystifying ending, as shall be shown in Chapter I.1.4.

This ‘goût de l’horrible’ (‘Choix de maximes consolantes sur l’amour’, OC I, pp. 548-549) and of disharmonic forms that Baudelaire possesses is also present in Boito’s work. In the 1865 letter that he sent to Cletto Arrighi as introduction to the poem ‘Ballatella’, Boito writes:

Noi scapigliati romantici in ira, alle regolari leggi del Bello, prediligiamo i Quasimodi nelle nostre fantasticherie. (OL, p. 11)

This choice of the irregular ‘Quasimodi’, with the explicit reference to the ugly and grotesque hunchback of Hugo’s *Notre-Dame de Paris*, over the ‘regolari leggi del Bello’ characterises most of the poems of *Il libro dei versi*. After all, as shown in the epistle written to Praga concerning Baudelaire’s death, Boito makes a plea to Hugo for his help (‘Dio e Victor Hugo ci aiutino!’); Hugo’s name does not appear here by



chance, nor in order to invoke Romantic idealism now that its supposed opposite, realism, is dead with Baudelaire, as Nardi has suggested.<sup>14</sup> In Boito's view, Hugo is to be considered as belonging to 'Realismo', to the idea of realism that pertains to Scapigliatura. Indeed, Hugo was one of Boito's literary models alongside Baudelaire, although he has to be considered, first and foremost, as a sort of inspiring and legendary figure for the Scapigliati and, consequently, more as a theoretical than a practical source of aesthetic ideas and poetic techniques, as we shall see further on. In the well-known 'Préface' to his drama *Cromwell* (1827), Hugo discusses the grotesque elements that, however fanciful and bizarre, are necessary to depict reality and, therefore, the true nature of the human being:

La poésie née du christianisme, la poésie de notre temps est donc le drame; le caractère du drame est le réel; le réel résulte de la combinaison toute naturelle de deux types, le sublime et le grotesque, qui se croisent dans le drame, comme ils se croisent dans la vie et dans la création.<sup>15</sup>

Boito's statement regarding the use of the 'Quasimodi' and the 'fantasticherie' as sources of poetry highlights the preference for a subjective treatment of the subject matter based on the *rêverie*, including fantastic and hyperbolic elements instead of being a mere mimetic copy of reality. One of Boito's 'Quasimodi' is certainly the aforementioned mummy, representative of the aesthetic and moral ugliness in modern times yet represented with both a positive and a negative terminology. It is surely worthy to investigate if Boito himself was trying to create his *Fleurs du Mal* in *Il libro dei versi*, namely to illustrate the beauty of the most horrendous elements of the real.

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<sup>14</sup> *Vita di Arrigo Boito*, p. 350.

<sup>15</sup> *Théâtre complet*, 2 vols, ed. by Josette Méléze and Jean-Jacques Thierry (Paris: Gallimard, 'Bibliothèque de la Pléiade', 1964), I, 425.

The first thing to notice in the introduction to ‘Ballatella’ is that the departure from the ‘regolari leggi del Bello’ does not lead to the foundation of a new aesthetic category and to the conception of a relative *beauty* inherent in the ‘ugly’ nineteenth century. Notwithstanding his efforts to show the charm of the horrible artefact, in ‘A una mummia’ Boito either praises the splendid elements of the past at odds with what remains of the mummy in the present day, such as the antique and ‘logori / Papiri sontuösi’, or he shows the contrasting feelings of nineteenth-century people in front of the anthropological artefact, thus only *indirectly* stating his liking of the mummy. By choosing to treat poetically unpleasant and irregular subjects, during his Scapigliatura period Boito refused the idealistic notion of absolute, regular and proportioned beauty, considered too abstract. He admits this in ‘Dualismo’ with the following stanza:

E sogno un’Arte eterea  
 Che forse in cielo ha norma,  
 Franca dai rudi vincoli  
 Del metro e della forma,  
 Piena dell’Ideale  
 Che mi fa batter l’ale  
 E che seguir non so. (OL, pp. 54-55, ll. 71-77)

The traditional notion of the ideal, which still remains part of Boito’s conception of a ‘Realismo’ capable of conveying the whole human experience characterised by instability and vicissitudes between ‘paradiso e inferno’ (l. 104) or ‘peccato’ and ‘virtù’ (ll. 111-112), is felt as being unreachable, hence the distinctive preference for the ‘Arte reprobata / Che smaga il mio pensiero / Dietro le basse immagini / D’un ver che mente al Vero’ (ll. 92-95). Through the German Romantics, this idea of absolute and Platonic beauty, connected to ideas of the True and moral Good, not only became part of the aesthetic theories and religious ideals of Italian Romantics, but

also influenced many French Romantics, such as Hugo and Lamartine, with some exceptions including Baudelaire's much admired Stendhal.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, unlike Baudelaire, Boito 'non provvede a fornirsi di un'estetica di ricambio' that can act as a substitute for the rejection of a traditional vision of beauty.<sup>17</sup> Despite some revolutionary statements that hint at the possible relativity of beauty and the ideal which could have been uttered by Baudelaire, such as 'Il Bello può incarnarsi con tutte le varietà della forma, le più bizzarre, le più molteplici, le più disparate',<sup>18</sup> or 'l'ideale è molteplice come il colore dei mille paesi di questa terra' ('Mendelssohn in Italia', TS, p. 1249), in his poetic compositions and in his articles Boito tends to maintain the classic opposition between ugliness and conventional beauty. Therefore, the 'regolari leggi del Bello' are occasionally placed in sharp contrast with grotesque and monstrous figures, and when these combine by means of oxymora and juxtapositions, as often happens in Boito, it is to comprehensively portray a paradoxical reality and, consequently, to parody those very same 'regolari leggi del Bello'. In spite of Baudelaire's stylistic and thematic influence, Boito did not succeed – or was not interested – in employing the oxymoron as revolutionarily as Baudelaire did. Accordingly, in *Il libro dei versi* the juxtapositions serve not to represent the duality of beauty, but to depict the dualisms of life: the definition of Baudelaire as *chef de file* of 'Realismo' has to be considered in this manner.

Boito's 'Realismo' aims not so much to transform aesthetic ugliness or moral desperation into poetic material by showing their relative beauty, as to represent them in poetry with an evident fondness and sympathy as products of the loss of a

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Michel Brix, 'Modern Beauty versus Platonist Beauty', in *Baudelaire and the Poetics of Modernity*, ed. by Patricia A. Ward, pp. 1-5.

<sup>17</sup> Villa, p. 32.

<sup>18</sup> 'Esperimenti della Società del Quartetto: secondo esperimento' (7 May 1865), TS, p. 1171.

traditional idea of beauty. This loss involves the refusal of notions of religious truth and morality, and gave Boito the possibility to deal with any kind of material without any moralistic purposes. The choice of certain poetic subjects entailed a specific aesthetic selection: as Boito affirms in ‘A Giovanni Camerana’, ‘E non trovando il Bello / Ci abbranchiamo all’Orrendo’ (OL, p. 80, ll. 55-56). As Patrizia Bettella states, ‘For Boito acknowledging the presence of the ugly means abandoning classical ideals of beauty’, unlike Baudelaire, for whom ‘beauty is to be found in both the divine and the infernal’.<sup>19</sup> Boito’s ‘Realismo’ implies a ‘totale indipendenza dell’arte dalla morale (cattolica in primo luogo)’,<sup>20</sup> in order to depict reality ‘sottratta al vincolo di pregiudiziali moralistiche, negata a finalità educative o edificanti’ and to ‘rappresentare il bene e il male indifferentemente’.<sup>21</sup> Claiming with a belligerent and avant-garde vocabulary that in order to lead art to the future it was necessary to ‘pungere, di piagare, di crivellare’, and that pessimism was ‘l’angolo acuto dell’intelletto’ (‘Polemica letteraria’, OL, p. 330), Boito resolves to create poetry that deals with ugly and irregular subjects, and to write about the decadence of modern times.

### 1.3 An Ill and Decadent art: Boito and the Irregular Forms of Contemporaneity

As already shown, Boito describes his art as ‘malata, vaneggiante, al dire di molti, un’arte di decadenza’, thus converting words that critics and detractors might have used as insults (‘al dire di molti’), such as ‘malata’ and ‘decadenza’, into positive

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<sup>19</sup> ‘The Debate on Beauty and Ugliness in Italian Scapigliatura and Baudelaire’, *Rivista di studi italiani*, 1 (2000), p. 77.

<sup>20</sup> Emanuele d’Angelo, *Arrigo Boito drammaturgo per musica: idee, visioni, forma e battaglie* (Venice: Marsilio, 2010), p. 86.

<sup>21</sup> Villa, pp. 7-8.

expressions. In the 1840s and 1850s, alongside Gautier, Baudelaire had already redefined the word ‘*décadence*’, attaching different meanings to it and identifying it ‘with a new and modern poetic movement’.<sup>22</sup> In the ‘Notes nouvelles sur Edgar Poe’, for example, Baudelaire strips the idea of decadence of its negative connotations. There, Baudelaire first sarcastically criticises the existing conception of ‘*décadence*’ in nineteenth-century France as used by contemporary critics following a traditional idea of beauty: ‘*Littérature de décadence!* – Paroles vides que nous entendons souvent tomber, avec la sonorité d’un bâillement emphatique, de la bouche de ces sphinx sans énigme qui veillent devant les portes saintes de l’Esthétique classique’ (OC II, p. 319). Baudelaire then exposes his idea of ‘literature of decadence’ and declares that themes involving decay, as symbolised by the figure of the setting sun, are preferred by certain poets, whose ‘style est magnifiquement orné’ (OC II, p. 319): ‘Dans les jeux de ce soleil agonisant, certains esprits poétiques trouveront des délices nouvelles [...]. Et le coucher du soleil leur apparaîtra en effet comme la merveilleuse allégorie d’une âme chargée de vie’ (OC II, p. 320). Subsequently, he discusses the concept of decline in contemporary times, and the notion that writers are obliged to work in a world dominated by the obsessive idea of progress, described as veritable decadence and ‘cette grande hérésie de la décrépitude’ (OC II, p. 324). According to Baudelaire, since the new ‘*littérature de décadence*’ transmutes the ugly products of the decline of Western civilisation into poetic beauty, this has to be considered as the art of modernity, and it can certainly be qualitatively comparable to Classical literature.<sup>23</sup> This essay was well known to Praga, who probably co-signed the ‘Polemica letteraria’ with Boito in 1864, in which ‘*Realismo*’

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<sup>22</sup> McGuinness, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Andrea Gogroff-Voorhees, *Defining Modernism: Baudelaire and Nietzsche on Romanticism, Modernity, Decadence, and Wagner* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), pp. 66-67.

is described as ‘arte di decadenza’. In 1871, Praga quoted the ‘Notes nouvelles sur Edgar Poe’ in the fourth article entitled ‘L’esposizione di Belle Arti: lettere e divagazioni’, published on 27 September in the journal *Il Pungolo*, paraphrasing from ‘Baudelaire nelle critiche che precedono la traduzione di Poe’ the idea that the artistic process itself, and not morality or moralism, could ‘cure’ any kind of ‘ill’ material: ‘L’arte basta a se stessa [...]; quando il suo soffio, passa sano e robusto, ciò che resta dietro di lei è innalzato alla sua dignità’.<sup>24</sup>

It is possible to observe Baudelaire’s disgust towards materialistic progress in various writings, among which is the article dedicated to the 1855 *Exposition universelle*, focused on the modern notion of progress applied to art. There, Baudelaire writes that ‘l’idée du progrès [...] jette des ténèbres sur tous les objets de la connaissance; la liberté s’évanouit, le châtement disparaît’ (OC II, p. 580). This vision of progress as restriction of individual and artistic liberty is very close to Boito’s ideas as expressed in the novella-essay ‘La musica in piazza’ (1870-1871), in which he declares that ‘Uno dei risultati del progresso è l’ammansamento, l’ingabbiamento volontario di tutte le cose e di tutti gli animali, compreso l’uomo. [...] Non v’è gabbia senza circoscrizione di spazio e di libertà [...] Dunque fuor dalla gabbia!’ (OL, p. 200). It is therefore understandable why in several poems of the *Libro dei versi* Boito condemns the products of progress and of the modern epoch: photography, in ‘Madrigale’; modern science that for purely commercial purposes conserves the mummy in a museum, in ‘A una mummia’, or that immodestly dissects the body of a young girl, in ‘Lezione d’anatomia’; the fierce demolition of old buildings and the even fiercer construction of new, in ‘Case nuove’. In Boito’s poetic

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<sup>24</sup> Repr. in *La pubblicistica nel periodo della Scapigliatura*, ed. by Giuseppe Farinelli, p. 1053.

compositions, progress is not treated as a positive subject, or as a possibility of advancement for humanity. On the contrary, its negative aspects serve as source material of the new art of Scapigliatura, which represents an aesthetic and moral correlative of the degeneration of contemporary times.

In point of fact, the association between poetry and modern forms is evident in the poem ‘Case nuove’ (OL, p. 58), in which the city, far from being a mere subject of the poem, becomes an active agent of modernity in the process of poetic creation. Boito composes a bitter, polemical, and very rhythmical ‘ode alla calce e al rettifilo’ (l. 11), and emphasises the equivalence between the disharmonic form of the poem and the irregularity of the gloomy city with its new buildings in the following manner:

Suoni l’ode alla calce e al rettifilo!  
Piangan pure i poeti.  
La progenie dei lupi e delle scrofe  
Oggi è sovrana e intanto le pareti  
Della vecchia cittade hanno un profilo  
Scomposto e tetro, – simigliante al metro  
Di questa strofe. (ll. 11-17)

The internal rhyme ‘tetro’/‘metro’ expresses the poet’s moral dejection, which becomes part of the formal structure of the composition alongside the irregular outline of the city, and recalls the lines ‘con tetro / Tedio, avvicendo il metro’ from ‘Dualismo’ (OL, p. 53, ll. 26-27) that convey the speaker’s spleen. The incorporation of the features of the modern city into the poem entails the choice of a specific (and discordant) metrical scheme; it also requires the poet to introduce a new category of words, such as ‘calce’ and ‘rettifilo’, rhymes, such as ‘poeti’/‘pareti’, and verses that are able to stress even more the analogy between poetry and the city, as Baudelaire had already claimed in ‘Le Soleil’:

Je vais m'exercer seul à ma fantasque escrime,  
Flairant dans tous les coins les hasards de la rime,  
Trébuchant sur les mots comme sur les pavés,  
Heurtant parfois des vers depuis longtemps rêvés. (OC I, p. 83, ll. 5-8)

Other scholars have already underlined the influence of Baudelaire's 'Le Cygne' and 'Les Aveugles', both belonging to the section 'Tableaux parisiens', on 'Case nuove'. Arnaldo Di Benedetto examines the polemical contrast between noble words and technical terms in 'Case nuove', which according to him derived from the prosaic style of the parts of 'Le Cygne' that discuss the changing topography of Paris under the supervision of Haussmann. Moreover, following previous scholarship, he highlights the similarity between Boito's and Baudelaire's depiction of the sense of alienation in two cities, Milan and Paris, subject to modern urban redevelopment and transformation, symbolised by the swan in 'Le Cygne' and by the image of the 'cieco brancolante in sulla sponda / Della contrada' (ll. 32-33) who loses his way like an 'uom che sogna' (l. 34) in 'Case nuove'.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, Michele Dell'Aquila associates this last image of the wandering blind man with Baudelaire's 'Les Aveugles'.<sup>26</sup>

Boito's experimental rhyming technique in 'Case nuove' had already been used, in a similar manner, by Baudelaire in some poems of the *Fleurs*. This involves the bizarre association in rhyme position of words belonging to different registers and categories, bringing together poetic expressions and prosaic images of everyday life such as 'poeti'/'pareti', 'scrofe'/'strofe', 'fregi vieti'/'arïeti' (ll. 8-9), 'fogna'/'sogna' (ll. 30, 34). Baudelaire had discussed Poe's strange and peculiar

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<sup>25</sup> "'Case nuove" o le rovine di Milano', pp. 16-18; 30.

<sup>26</sup> 'La lacerazione delle forme e l'allegoria della morte nel "Libro dei versi" di Arrigo Boito', *Otto/Novecento*, 5, no. 1 (Jan/Feb 1981), p. 63.



rhyme associations in ‘Notes nouvelles sur Edgar Poe’, claiming that Poe tried to ‘rajeunir, à redoubler le plaisir de la rime en y ajoutant cet élément inattendu, l’étrangeté’ (OC II, p. 336). In the famous poem ‘Une charogne’ (OC I, pp. 31-32), Baudelaire certainly introduced this ‘strangeness’ into his own poetry by rhyming the following words: ‘mon âme’ and ‘infâme’ (ll. 1, 3); ‘pourriture’ and ‘grande Nature’ (ll. 9, 11); ‘infection’ and ‘passion’ (ll. 38, 40); ‘grâces’ and ‘grasses’ (ll. 41, 43); ‘vermine’ and ‘divine’ (ll. 45, 47). In ‘Le Soleil’, Baudelaire employs a parallel method, and illustrates the ‘hasards de la rime’ found in the city with the rhymes ‘pavés’/‘rêvés’ (ll. 7-8), similar to Boito’s ‘poeti’/‘pareti’ and ‘fogna’/‘sogna’, as well as ‘chloroses’/‘roses’ (ll. 9-10) and ‘porteurs de béquilles’/‘jeunes filles’ (ll. 13-14). In ‘Case nuove’, Boito himself explicitly acknowledges that the uncontrolled construction of new buildings, the ‘new houses’ of the title, is the expression of the decadence of humanity in contemporary times: ‘L’umanità cammina / Ratta così che par sovra una china’ (ll. 5-6). Considering the many metapoetic references present in ‘Case nuove’ and in other poems of the *Libro dei versi*, such as ‘Piangan pure i poeti’, it is possible to speak of the decadence of an art that struggles to cope with modernity, and that gradually loses importance in modern society, as Francesco Spera,<sup>27</sup> Fabio Finotti,<sup>28</sup> and Dell’Aquila,<sup>29</sup> among others, have pointed out.

It has to be taken into account, however, that in *Il libro dei versi* Boito proudly shows his many wreckages of decadence to be the only possible subjects of present times, inasmuch as in ‘A Giovanni Camerana’ (OL, pp. 79-80) they are described as a ‘trofèò’ of Scapigliatura’s ‘Arte’ (ll. 37-38), and in ‘A Emilio Praga’ (OL, pp. 77-78) as ‘il segno della nostra gloria’ (l. 15). In these two poems dedicated

<sup>27</sup> ‘Le sperimentazioni poetiche di Boito’, in *Arrigo Boito*, ed. by Giovanni Morelli, pp. 2-3.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. ‘Il demone dello stile’, in *Arrigo Boito*, ed. by Giovanni Morelli, p. 48.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. ‘La lacerazione delle forme’, p. 65.

to his fellow Scapigliati, Boito announces their common avant-gardist ideals and status as veritable *poètes maudits* in a hostile society, while, admittedly, also ostentatiously posing as one of the (if not *the*) most accursed of them all: in ‘A Emilio Praga’ he speaks of ‘Arte dell’avvenire’ (l. 12), of ‘il vulgo’ that ‘intuona per le piazze / La fanfara dell’ire’ (ll. 9-10), and of the fact that he has ‘già percorso / Assai la vita rea’ (ll. 25-26); in ‘A Giovanni Camerana’, he announces his ‘rivolta pazza’ (l. 43) and proclaims himself as ‘pur fra i primi di cotesta razza’ to *shout* ‘il canto anatemico e macabro’ (ll. 41-42), also employing the oxymoron ‘bestemmia / Sublime e strana’ (ll. 45-46) to describe Praga’s poetry. In ‘A Emilio Praga’, Boito figuratively depicts the unfortunate (yet honourable) condition of the poets of Scapigliatura by means of metaphors involving images of fall and decadence, emphasising the sense of loss of traditional values and the subsequent focus on miserable poetic subjects of modernity with expressions such as ‘cadute’ (l. 3), ‘Precipitiam’ (l. 5), ‘scendo’ (l. 45), ‘travolta’, ‘vertigine’ (ll. 47-48) and, most notably, with the following passage:

Or sul suol piombiam verso il fatale  
 Peso che a’ pesi è somma,  
 Or balziam nel ciel dell’Ideale,  
 Vuote palle di gomma. (ll. 21-24)

The dejected tone of the whole composition, where the poet ‘Rifec[e] il voto a una [su]a forte mèta / E cento volte e mille’ (ll. 35-36) and yet his poetry is deemed as ‘Vanità! Vanità! glorie sognate! / Perdute illusioni!’ (ll. 39-40), shares many similarities with the description of the paradoxical situation of the human being (and, consequently, of the artist), ‘dont jamais l’espérance n’est lasse’ (OC I, p. 130, l. 31) but whose ‘Amour...gloire...bonheur!’ are in fact solely a dangerous and

metaphorical ‘écueil’ (l. 36) against which a ship can crash, recounted in the second section of ‘Le Voyage’, the long poem that concludes the 1861 edition of the *Fleurs*. Most significantly, the image of the rubber ball that leaps into the sky, which in ‘A Emilio Praga’ is used to represent a constant yet futile search for the artistic ideal, is plainly taken from the first quatrain of that second section of ‘Le Voyage’, to wit from the following lines that, in an analogous fashion to ‘A Emilio Praga’, are narrated in the first-person plural: ‘Nous imitions, horreur! La toupie et la boule / Dans leur valse et leurs bonds’ (ll. 25-26).

Before Boito, Baudelaire had already described his *Fleurs* as ‘maladives’ in the *dédicace* to Gautier (OC I, p. 3), as well his muse in ‘La Muse malade’ (OC I, pp. 14-15). This sonnet discusses the modern muse that, unlike in the ‘healthy’ Classical and pre-Christian times (ll. 9-14), is tormented by ‘La folie et l’horreur’ (l. 4), by ‘cauchemar’ (l. 7) and ‘visions nocturnes’ (l. 2), hence providing the poet with a distressing inspiration. In ‘A Giovanni Camerana’, Boito draws on the Baudelairian idea of the lugubrious muse, and in Boito’s poem the muse can offer the Scapigliati, described as ‘poeti suicidi’ (l. 36), only what Boito describes as the ‘Orrendo’ (l. 56), namely wretched subjects symbolised by the conceits of the ‘verme’ and the ‘aborto’ (l. 38): ‘Torva è la Musa’ (l. 33). This unambiguously emphasises the importance that Boito, Praga, and Camerana gave to poetic material taken from negative aspects of modern life, which was the preferred choice of Scapigliatura’s poets.

The composition ‘Un torso’ (OL, pp. 62-64) is also a product of Boito’s gloomy muse. The poem portrays the degradation and decadence of an ancient Greek statue of Venus, from the time when it was only a block of marble on the top of a

mountain to its present state in the form of the grotesque torso without limbs or head, which allegorically represents the change of aesthetic principles since the Classical period. Even though there may still be a place for the Platonic conception of beauty in the juxtaposition of the block of marble (representing the ideal) and the statue (representing the creation of the artist), in ‘Un torso’ Boito is more interested in the relationship between past and present, and in the opposition between Classical forms and the deformations of modern times. The torso is an ‘emblema non più della bellezza classica bensì dei boitiani e scapigliati “Quasimodi”’.<sup>30</sup> The poetic sources and muses of Scapigliatura are not regular and healthy any more, rather they are corrupted and ill, and represent the Scapigliati’s choice of an alternative aesthetic model compared to that present in the Greek-Roman world:

Quel torso era una Venere  
 Che un arcaico scalpello  
 Creò ne’ suoi più fervidi  
 Morsi d’amor col Bello;  
 Oggi, marmoreo enigma  
 Dall’olimpico stigma,  
 Di tant’arte non resta  
 Che un busto senza testa.

Pur nelle tronche viscere  
 La Dea non è ancor morta,  
 Un’agonia di secoli  
 La fece fredda e smorta,  
 Ma nella nuda fibra  
 Palpita, guizza, vibra,  
 Quasi monco serpente,  
 L’Eginetica mente.

Così le fece il genio  
 Le piaghe sue più grame,  
 E le eternò il martirio  
 Di Mosca e di Bertrame.  
 Pur colle rotte braccia  
 Quel torso ancor m’allaccia,  
 E al secolo che raglia  
 Sembra cercar battaglia. (ll. 1-24)

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<sup>30</sup> Angela Ida Villa, ‘Introduzioni e note’, in OL, p. 414.

The Greek sculptor created the statue of the goddess of beauty in his most passionate ‘morsi d’amor col Bello’, and all that is left in the present is a grotesque torso. The torso still retains some charm and appeal, although in a contradictory manner it is deformed, since the goddess (that is, beauty) is still present in the statue (‘non è ancor morta’), but she is ill and pale (‘Un’agonia di secoli / La fece fredda e smorta’) and possesses human features that make the statue resemble a genuine mutilated corpse (‘tronche viscere’; ‘nuda fibra’; ‘piaghe’). The simile between ‘l’Eginetica mente’, the remnant of Classical beauty that still pulsates in the sculpture, and the horrible maimed serpent that springs up serves as another oxymoronic juxtaposition between beauty and ugliness, in the attempt to describe the fascinating irregular form of the torso and to define a new aesthetic category.

The analogy between the shape of the snake and a mutilated female body was already made by Baudelaire in ‘Une martyre’, a poem that is more thoroughly analysed in Chapter I.1.4 in conjunction with ‘Lezione d’anatomia’. This composition, subtitled ‘Dessin d’un Maître inconnu’, is a verbal transposition of a (supposedly fictional) work of visual art, or *ekphrasis*. ‘Une martyre’ minutely describes the decapitated corpse of a woman lying on a bed, whose ‘tronc nu’ (OC I, p. 112, l. 21) shows her ‘beauté fatale’ (l. 23) as well as her youth. The comparison between the image of the springing ‘reptile’ – used as a synonym for snake – and the features of the maimed corpse is similar to that employed by Boito in ‘Un torso’, albeit more realistically described: ‘La hanche un peu pointue et la taille fringante / Ainsi qu’un reptile irrité’ (ll. 39-40). As a matter of fact, Boito’s poem can also be considered as an example of *ekphrasis* since both authors portray a mutilated female

body that is already a work of art. They both also refer to this mutilation as *martyrdom* – Baudelaire in the title of his composition, and Boito by means of the following lines: ‘E le eternò il martirio’.

The speaker’s fondness for the current features of the statue is explicit in the lines ‘Pur colle rotte braccia / Quel torso ancor m’allaccia’, and the last line of the poem, as mentioned above, explains how the bust ‘Sembra cercar battaglia’ in the nineteenth century, which is an epoch that ‘raglia’ just like the donkey and is ignorant towards the new aesthetic theories of Scapigliatura. Boito indeed seems to declare that aesthetic ideals have deteriorated since the Classical Golden Age. Yet despite the apparent sentimentalism towards Greece and the Roman world (in which there is also a reference to the debauched Latin decadence experienced by the statue),<sup>31</sup> the main poetic subject is still the mutilated torso of contemporary times. Up to the present, the torso has endured, analogously to the life of a human being and once again in a dualistic fashion, ‘Sublimi tempi olimpici / E putride cloàche, / E baci di caleïdi, / E sputi di lumache’ (ll. 97-100). The two juxtapositions of the opposite adjectives ‘sublimi’ and ‘putride’ and of the opposite nouns ‘baci’ and ‘sputi’ display another effort to illustrate the totality of reality with its positive and negative aspects, comparable to the abovementioned ‘Dualismo’.

Despite the Parnassian, or better proto-Parnassian<sup>32</sup> influence that Mariani,<sup>33</sup> among others, has pointed out and that are mainly in the broad idea of a poem

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<sup>31</sup> ‘Poi t’ebbe Roma [...] Vivesti in mezzo al fremito / Dell’orge e nei triclini / Dove fetèa la nausea / Dei tracannati vini; / Là, fra le turpi e gaie / Follie delle ambubaie / Con un osceno crollo / T’hanno fiaccato il collo’ (ll. 73, 81-88).

<sup>32</sup> The term ‘Parnasse’, which is used to indicate the poetic trend associated with the anthology *Le Parnasse contemporain*, was employed for the first time in March 1866 with the publication of the first of the eighteen issues of the anthology. See Yann Mortelette, *Histoire du Parnasse* (Paris: Fayard, 2005), pp. 169-223. Speaking of Parnassian influence on ‘Un torso’, which bears the date ‘1862’, would thus be an anachronism.

<sup>33</sup> According to Mariani, pp. 314-315, the sources of the poem have to be found specifically in Théodore de Banville’s ‘À Vénus de Milo’ and in Gautier’s ‘Niobé’.

addressed to a statue of Venus, ‘Un torso’ does not deal with the nostalgic evocations of a remote past precisely because of Boito’s conscious and proud choice of the ugly torso as a model for Scapigliatura’s art, and as a new aesthetic paradigm of modern times. This predilection for the present over the past is clear in the ironic conclusion of the poem, which stands opposite to the celebration of Classical beauty in poems such as Théodore de Banville’s ‘À Vénus de Milo’, where the lyrical I strives to reconstruct the original shape of the statue (‘si vous retrouviez un jour vos bras perdus [...]’).<sup>34</sup> The last stanza denounces attempts to restore artistic ideals that were certainly noble but by then obsolete, and is a straightforward polemic against progress and the modern science of restoration:

Ma no! questa prosaica  
 Gente ch’or ti raccolse,  
 Adoratrice instabile  
 D’arti sfrenate o bolse,  
 Oggi forse minaccia  
 Quelle tue monche braccia  
 Di più fiero dolore:  
 Il restäuratore. (ll. 105-112)

According to Boito, it is preferable that the torso remains as such, even if it is deformed, rather than trying to repair it in an age so distant from when it was created.

A similar analysis of the contrast between Classical beauty and irregular, ill forms of modernity is present in Baudelaire not only in the abovementioned ‘La Muse malade’, but also in ‘J’aime le souvenir...’ (OC I, pp. 11-12). In the first section of the poem, Baudelaire describes the physical appearance of the human being in the Classical Golden Age, when Phoebus used to ‘dorer les statues’ (l. 2). Men and women were vigorous, as they ‘Exerçaient la santé de leur noble machine’

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<sup>34</sup> *Œuvres poétiques complètes*, 7 vols, ed by Peter J. Edwards (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2000), I, 225, l. 10.

(l. 6), and were a perfect model for the poet. Their beauty and their ‘chair lisse et ferme appelait les morsures’ (l. 14). The second section of the poem introduces the discourse of the decadence of contemporary times, which is characterised by decrepit bodies: human beings are transformed into ‘monstruosités’ (l. 20) and ‘ridicules troncs! torses dignes des masques!’ (l. 21). Baudelaire also criticises progress and the materialist mentality, given that the degradation of the body has been caused by the ‘dieu de l’Utile, implacable et serein’ (l. 23). Consequently, in the nineteenth century the modern ‘nations corrompues’ (l. 29), that is the ‘races malades’ (l. 34), have a new kind of beauty, ill and ‘de langueur’ (ll. 31-32), which is a product of the ‘muses tardives’ (l. 33) and is represented by the ‘femmes [...] pâles comme des cierges, / Que ronge et que nourrit la débauche’ (ll. 25-26). Analogously to ‘Un Torso’, in Baudelaire’s composition there is a stark juxtaposition of Classical beauty with the irregular images of modernity.

By employing a proto-Parnassian imagery alongside a typical Baudelairian theme,<sup>35</sup> Boito substitutes Baudelaire’s ‘corps de la Beauté antique [qui] se fragmente en autant de “troncs” et de “torses” caricaturaux’<sup>36</sup> with a marble torso equally grotesque. In Boito’s poem there is little place for the erotic *double entendres* present in ‘J’aime le souvenir...’, but he still tries to convey the sensuality of the aesthetic forms of antiquity. In actuality, if in Baudelaire’s composition the beauty of the human body in the Golden Age was, like a fruit, a carnal invitation to the bites of love (‘la chair lisse et ferme appelait les morsures’), in ‘Un torso’ Boito similarly writes that the Greek sculptor created the statue ‘ne’ suoi più fervidi / Morsi d’amor

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<sup>35</sup> It has to be taken into account, however, that Baudelaire also represents beauty with a pre-Parnassian vocabulary in some poems. See for instance ‘La Beauté’, where he writes: ‘Je suis belle, ô mortels! comme un rêve de pierre’ (OC I, p. 21, l. 1).

<sup>36</sup> Labarthe, p. 323.



col Bello’.

In spite of the professed attraction towards the deformed object, in ‘Un torso’ Boito, unlike Baudelaire, does not formulate a systematic theory based on a modern and subjective beauty. Boito indeed engages in the depiction of everyday life, but by using the Classical Greek statue as a symbol of beauty – even if it is deformed and irregular in modernity – and not the body of the present-day human being, Boito remains linked to the past that is perceived as an irretrievable yet still existing aesthetic model. The poems of the *Libro dei versi* do not only discuss the decadence of Classical values; in the next section another pivotal theme of Boito’s dualistic poetics is analysed, namely the opposition between the real and the ideal in contemporary subjects.

#### **1.4 A Baudelairian (De)Idealisation of the Muse: ‘Lezione d’anatomia’**

‘Lezione d’anatomia’ is one of Boito’s most famous and controversial compositions of *Il libro dei versi*. In 1936 Binni already noticed Baudelaire’s influence on the poem, but he did not define it and dismissed the matter quickly by claiming that Boito ‘voleva essere baudelairiano’ but was actually closer to Giacomo Leopardi’s Romantic poem ‘Nella morte di una donna fatta trucidare col suo portato...’.<sup>37</sup> What Binni probably did not perceive is the subtle irony present in the last part of the poem. In ‘Lezione d’anatomia’ (OL, pp. 74-76), the seemingly strident juxtaposition of sublime and horrendous elements marks the impossible sublimation of the lacerated cadaver of an adolescent girl. The poem is composed of stanzas that oppose the medic’s anatomical dissection to the flights of fancy of the poet, who strives to

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<sup>37</sup> *La poetica del decadentismo*, p. 58.

idealise the horrible scene under his eyes. The poem reaches its climax with the contrasting encounter between the following stanzas, which juxtapose the abstract image of the religiously pure heart of the young girl and the concrete heart that the medic violently tears from her chest during the lesson:

Pur quella vergine  
Senza sudario  
Sperò, nell'ore  
Più melanconiche  
Come un santuario  
Chiuse il suo cuore,  
  
Ed ora il clinico  
Che glielo svelle  
Grida ed esorta:  
'Ecco le *valvole*,'  
'Ecco le *celle*,'  
'Ecco l'*aòrta*.' (ll. 49-60)

The realistic stanza appears to block any attempt of Romantic sentimental reverie on the beautiful adolescent. However, when the poem approaches its conclusion, the speaker seems to idealise the cadaver of the girl, who is imaged in a Petrarchan fashion as 'Fanciulla pia, / Dolce, purissima, / Fiore languente, / Di poësia!' (ll. 75-78). The contrast between the sublime and the horrendous returns in the last stanza, in which the speaker finally resolves the conflict by ending the poem with a deformed image, employing a similar tone to 'Un torso':

E mentre suscito  
Nel mio segreto  
Quei sogni adorni,...  
In quel cadavere  
Si scopre un feto  
Di trenta giorni. (ll. 79-84)

The demystifying ending, with the foetus found in the body of the girl, serves not only to demonstrate that the real always exists alongside (and inside) the ideal, or to

subvert the ‘*topos* dell’idealizzazione romantica della donna’,<sup>38</sup> but, I think, also to represent the wholeness of reality with all its ironies, according to Boito’s idea of realism, thus describing the poetic subject in a contradictory manner. The adolescent that before the last stanza was depicted with only positive adjectives related to her chastity such as ‘vergine’, ‘pia’, and ‘purissima’ is discovered pregnant, that is to say she is not as ‘virginal’, ‘pious’, or ‘pure’ as was believed. On the contrary, the speaker implies that she has already experienced sexual intercourse that caused her pregnancy, and inside her is present what Baudelaire called the ‘hideurs de la fécondité’ in ‘J’aime le souvenir...’ (OC I, p. 12, l. 28), namely what Boito himself would call the ‘Orrendo’ in ‘A Giovanni Camerana’. This overturning allows Boito to illustrate the duality of the woman: the Petrarchan or Stilnovistic idealised lady also possesses profound dark features, since she is or can be a sinful being inclined to lust. This double portrayal of the woman is typical in Boito as much as it is in Baudelaire, as it will be shown in Chapter I.2.5.

Baudelaire had already utilised the uncommon figure of the foetus in poetry, in two compositions of the *Fleurs*: in ‘Les Phares’, where he describes Goya’s pictures as nightmares full of ‘fœtus qu’on fait cuire au milieu des sabbats’ (OC I, p. 13, l. 26), and in ‘Châtiment de l’orgueil’, in which the poet describes Jesus as ‘fœtus dérisoire’ (OC I, p. 20, l. 14). The poem in which the opposition between the real and the ideal is most pronounced, however, is the famous ‘Une charogne’ (OC I, pp. 31-32). On a thematic level, in ‘Une charogne’ the juxtapositions focus on the relationship between a revolting carcass – most likely, although not expressively specified, that of an animal – and two different subjects, the speaker’s mistress and

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<sup>38</sup> Villa, ‘Introduzioni e note’, p. 426.

nature, both Romantically represented in their most idealistic aspects. The opening is disconcerting in its contrast between sublime and repugnant elements:

Rappelez-vous l'objet que nous vîmes, mon âme,  
Ce beau matin d'été si doux:  
Au détour d'un sentier une charogne infâme  
Sur un lit semé de cailloux. (ll. 1-4)

Even more so than in 'Lezione d'anatomia', with the oxymoronic juxtapositions of the words 'mon âme' and 'infâme' in rhyme position, Baudelaire conveys the shock caused by the intrusion of reality in a scene depicted with idyllic tones. The poem continues with the dissonant analogy between the putrescence of the *charogne* and the powers of nature: the sky contemplates the carcass 'Comme une fleur s'épanouir' (l. 14); and the noise caused by the air that inflates and deflates the corpse becomes rather ironically an 'étrange musique, / Comme l'eau courante et le vent' (ll. 25-26). The mistress is described, in a similar fashion to Boito's poem, with terms typical of the Romantic idealistic tradition, and the clash between the real and the ideal reaches its culmination in the last section of the composition through the opposition of the words in rhyme position, as well as the comparison between the deceased lady and the carcass:

Et pourtant vous serez semblable à cette ordure,  
À cette horrible infection  
Étoile de mes yeux, soleil de ma nature,  
Vous, mon ange et ma passion! (ll. 37-40)

With its sarcastic tone, the conclusion can only be considered as a demystification of the positive stances on the idealisation of a dead body, which will dissolve by means of worms. Regarding the following ending of the poem, Patrick Labarthe speaks of debunking the 'mensonge idéalisant qui habite la rhétorique de l'amour courtois, ou

pétrarquiste, ici subvertie’.<sup>39</sup>

Alors, ô ma beauté! dites à la vermine  
Qui vous mangera de baisers,  
Que j’ai gardé la forme et l’essence divine  
De mes amours décomposés! (ll. 45-48)

Certainly, in ‘Lezione d’anatomia’ Boito is more schematic and keeps the sublime and repulsive elements separated in order to charge the demystifying ending with meaning, and he does not attain the expressive force of Baudelaire’s vocabulary and oppositions. Furthermore, in Baudelaire’s poem the juxtapositions are employed as an attempt to transfigure reality, to create immortal poetry that can withstand death and decomposition, as well as to extract beauty from everyday subjects. Testimony to this effort is once again the oxymoron, such as ‘carcasse superbe’ (l. 13). The different purpose of Boito’s and Baudelaire’s oxymora is evident in their dissimilar use in ‘Une charogne’ and ‘Lezione d’anatomia’. With the expression ‘carcasse superbe’, and its association with the blossoming flower (l. 14), Baudelaire tries to represent a ‘flower of evil’ that is poetically born out of a disgusting and repugnant image. Boito instead describes the ‘cadavere’ (l. 25) of the young girl as ‘Steril connubio! / Sapienza insana!’ (ll. 26-27), in order to show the paradoxical nature of the ‘Scienza umana’ (l. 30): when dissecting the body of a beautiful girl, science does not lead to knowledge but casts only more doubts to the speaker (ll. 28-29), probably in terms of metaphysical suppositions concerning death.

However, in ‘Une charogne’ the forced juxtapositions of images belonging to opposite categories, the traditional Romantic vocabulary, and the clash between

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<sup>39</sup> ‘La “mise en crise” de la relation amoureuse dans *Les Fleurs du Mal*’, in *Lectures de Baudelaire: ‘Les Fleurs du Mal’*, ed. by Steve Murphy (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2002), p. 118. This view is shared, among others, by William Olmsted, ‘Immortal Rot: A Reading of “Une Charogne”’, in *Understanding ‘Les Fleurs du Mal’: Critical Readings*, ed. by William J. Thompson (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1997), p. 70, who speaks of Baudelaire’s ‘antiidealism’.

disparate registers also reveal Baudelaire's sarcastic and debunking intentions towards both a Classical conception of beauty and a Romantic idealisation of the woman, which is probably what most influenced Boito. The conclusions of 'Une charogne' and 'Lezione d'anatomia', the first focused on the 'amours décomposés' and the second on the 'feto / Di trenta giorni', both show the de-idealisation of the muse, which disregards any easy sentimentalism and excludes any religious transcendence.

On a more thematic level, 'Lezione d'anatomia' is closer to another poem of the *Fleurs*, namely 'Une martyre' (OC I, pp. 111-113). I would argue that in terms of the specific idea of using the realistic portrayal of a mutilated corpse of a young girl, still bleeding, as a subject of poetry, for 'Lezione d'anatomia' Boito drew on 'Une martyre'. If in Baudelaire's poem 'Un cadavre sans tête épanche, comme un fleuve, / Sur l'oreiller désaltéré / Un sang rouge et vivant' (ll. 9-11), in Boito's 'sanguina / Per piaga immonda / Il petto a quella!' (ll. 19-21). Boito even utilises expressions previously employed by Baudelaire: 'Elle est bien jeune encor!' (l. 41), writes Baudelaire, and Boito follows with 'Ed era giovane!' (l. 22). Whilst observing the face of the cadaver, Boito's poet thinks about the 'teneri / Casi passati / Su quella testa' (ll. 37-39), and in Baudelaire's composition the head, placed upon the night table, is 'vide de pensers' (l. 18). In both 'Lezione d'anatomia' and 'Une martyre', there is space for the analysis of the feelings of the young girl. Boito focuses the description of the adolescent on her pious and devout aspects, and claims that 'nell'ore / Più melanconiche / Come un santuario / Chiuse il suo cuore' (ll. 51-54); Baudelaire's speaker, on the other hand, wonders what the girl used to do in the very same melancholic hours:

[...] Son âme exaspérée  
Et ses sens par l'ennui mordus  
S'étaient-ils entr'ouverts à la meute altérée  
Des désirs errants et perdus? (ll. 42-44)

This difference between the subject of Baudelaire's poem, who opens (if not completely 'entr'ouverts') her soul to sinful desires, and Boito's, who religiously shuts her heart in the very same situation, sanctions the apparent dissimilarity between the two characters. The young woman of 'Une martyre', guilty of having indulged in an 'amour ténébreux' (l. 32), has been murdered by her husband, probably because she could not satisfy 'L'immensité de son désir' (l. 48), indubitably an erotic desire. Since Boito intended to surprise the reader with the final *coup de théâtre*, in 'Lezione d'anatomia' there are none of the sadistic, erotic, and perverse features that are very much present in 'Une martyre', although these will form an important part of the themes that constitute the operatic poem *Re Orso*, as will be analysed further on. Nonetheless, towards the end the two poems show a certain resemblance: inside the cadaver of Boito's adolescent, who is definitely not 'very pure' as the speaker believed, there is a 'feto / Di trenta giorni' that reveals her licentious past, and the young lady of Baudelaire's composition is a 'cadavre impur' (l. 49) because she used to attend 'fêtes étranges / Pleines de baisers infernaux' (ll. 33-34). In an analogous manner to the other works already examined, in 'Une martyre' Baudelaire strives to convert a gruesome scene into his own personal notion of modern beauty by means of the poetic art. The poem thus becomes another veritable 'flower of evil', particularly in the passage in which the head of the corpse is compared to a flower: 'La tête [...] Sur la table de nuit, comme une renoncule, / Repose' (ll. 15, 17-18). The last stanza of the poem rejects any thoughts of

redemption for the murderous husband or any religious idealisation of the young girl – by referring to the demystifying ending of ‘Une charogne’ (‘la forme et l’essence divine’), it sarcastically attests that the only ‘immortal form’ of his wife that the husband will bring with him shall be the dreadful thought of the murder, which will follow him as he travels the world:

Ton époux court le monde, et ta forme immortelle  
Veille près de lui quand il dort;  
Autant que toi sans doute il te sera fidèle,  
Et constant jusques à la mort. (ll. 57-60)

In this section we have examined several types of irregularity based on the dualism of modernity in its various aspects present in *Il libro dei versi*, from the relationship between a degraded present and a lost past, to the opposition between the rejection of traditional beauty and the preference for grotesque and horrible forms. Notwithstanding the predilection for the irregular and the deformed, such as cadavers and maimed corpses, the Platonic conception of beauty linked to notions of religious Truth and moral Good is still employed as an element of contrast, even though it is ironically challenged and ultimately debunked. Boito in *Il libro dei versi* does apply in poetry his theoretical formulation of ‘Realismo’ as a new art composed of seemingly irreducible elements, as explicated in ‘Dualismo’, but he does not search for a new notion of subjective beauty, of a new, relative, and personal ideal. Although Boito chooses contemporary subjects, the fondness of which is expressed through oxymora and juxtapositions, he still compares them for the most part to their previous lives, depicted as residues of a past long gone though not nostalgically mourned. Boito surely managed to incorporate modernity into such poems as ‘Case nuove’, that is to say he created poetry that reflects the transitory aspects of his time



both conceptually and stylistically. However, instead of extracting the ‘beauté mystérieuse qui y peut être contenue [dans l’habit d’une époque]’, considered by Baudelaire as ‘la moitié de l’art’ (*Le Peintre de la vie moderne*, OC II, p. 695), Boito focuses on expressing the aesthetic and moral paradoxes of modern times, which can entail a deformed beauty that fascinates the speaker (‘Un torso’), or the maimed cadaver of an adolescent considered pure but who was actually pregnant (‘Lezione d’anatomia’).

Yet Boito did not draw from the *Fleurs* merely the stylistic technique of the oxymoron, or the depiction of ugly and macabre subjects of modernity. As shall be shown in the next section, by using a popular Romantic literary genre (particularly Hugolian), that is the fairy tale set in the Middle Ages, in *Re Orso* Boito focuses on the idea of Satanic and animalistic excess, and in order to discuss it poetically he introduces into Italian literature a very peculiar Baudelairian method: the depiction of the inescapable forces of evil examined without any moral or religious preconceptions.

## 2. An Allegory of Excess: ‘Re Orso’

*Pour ne pas oublier la chose capitale,  
Nous avons vu partout, et sans l’avoir cherché,  
Du haut jusques en bas de l’échelle fatale,  
Le spectacle ennuyeux de l’immortel péché:*

*La femme, esclave vile, orgueilleuse et stupide,  
Sans rire s’adorant et s’aimant sans dégoût;  
L’homme, tyran goulé, paillard, dur et cupide,  
Esclave de l’esclave et ruisseau dans l’égout;*

*Le bourreau qui jouit, le martyr qui sanglote;  
La fête qu’assaisonne et parfume le sang;  
Le poison du pouvoir énervant le despote,  
Et le peuple amoureux du fouet abrutissant.*

(Baudelaire, ‘Le Voyage VI’)

After more than 150 years since its first publication in 1864, critics have yet to find a common understanding regarding the main allegorical meaning behind Boito's dark fairy tale *Re Orso*. This surreal *poemetto* set in the Middle Ages tells the story of a wicked and sadistic despot of Crete, Re Orso, who is tormented by a refrain concerning the bite of worms. Boito's depiction of excess and perversity in the macabre and Gothic fairy tale is an escalating ride towards self-destruction, which is focused on the protagonist's various vices and on his anguish (and obsession) in the form of the following refrain:

*Re Orso  
Ti schermi  
Dal morso  
De' vermi.* (OL, p. 95, ll. 4-7)

The division of the fairy tale into two main segments, namely 'Leggenda prima: Orso vivo' and 'Leggenda seconda: Orso morto', in the typical dualism dear to Boito, defines the journeys of Re Orso and of the other protagonist, the worm. If the first section pertains to the king's moral journey to eternal agony focused on his sinful behaviour, the second is an allegorical one, portraying an immortal worm that symbolises corruption of both body and soul, which slowly makes its way to the grave of Re Orso, finally biting him and condemning him to an eternity of suffering for all the sins committed during his depraved life. Boito concludes the poem with the section 'Morale della fiaba', in which he ironically contradicts the didactic and moral goals of fairy tales by claiming that readers should use *Re Orso* for playing 'lotto' and not search for a 'sermo o perno – di morale eterno' in it (OL, p. 143, ll. 2-5).

Various and occasionally contrasting interpretations have been applied to the

text, oscillating from analyses that depict it as a nonsensical literary joke,<sup>40</sup> to studies that consider *Re Orso* as portraying the coming of the Antichrist.<sup>41</sup> In between these readings, the allegorical story has been described as representing: death that extinguishes everything, even the inexplicable evil in nature;<sup>42</sup> the evil caused by *Re Orso*, which returns as the worm that represents a destructive force and as the voice of remorse, in the form of the refrain, that haunts the protagonist;<sup>43</sup> or it has been described as denoting ‘alcune fondamentali verità, eterne vicende ed eterni sentimenti del cuore umano: l’odio, la vendetta, il rimorso, la solitudine e anche l’amore’.<sup>44</sup> However, critics are agreed on the prominence of an experimental operatic or ‘librettistic’ structure and ironic features in *Re Orso* – according to some aimed at deriding the pathetic, medieval-focused subjects and religious ideals of Italian Romanticism<sup>45</sup> – as well as on the seriousness of the allegorical substrate that has been considered of primary importance.

The misleading characteristics of *Re Orso* have been underlined by many scholars, alongside the importance of its sombre symbolism. Nardi asks himself whether with the ironic conclusion Boito did not want to ‘parodiare preventivamente i propri lettori, o i propri critici, disposti a lasciarsi prendere al laccio della presunzione che il poemetto fosse davvero un non senso’.<sup>46</sup> Croce claims that *Re Orso* ‘non è già, semplicemente, parodia: l’impressione centrale è seria’.<sup>47</sup> Spera speaks of a ‘discorso palesemente allegorico’ and a ‘ridondante simbologia del

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<sup>40</sup> See Alfredo Galletti, ‘Introduzione’, in Arrigo Boito, *Re Orso* (Milan: Caddeo, 1921), pp. 7-34.

<sup>41</sup> Villa, ‘Introduzioni e note’, p. 441.

<sup>42</sup> Croce, p. 262.

<sup>43</sup> Nardi, *Vita di Arrigo Boito*, pp. 171-172.

<sup>44</sup> Mariani, p. 350.

<sup>45</sup> Villa, ‘Introduzioni e note’, p. 440, speaks of a ‘*diminutio* parodica delle convenzioni romantiche’, and particularly of the ‘mito del medioevo riscoperto dai romantici’.

<sup>46</sup> *Vita di Arrigo Boito*, pp. 170-171.

<sup>47</sup> *La letteratura della nuova Italia*, p. 262.

male'.<sup>48</sup> Villa, who has dedicated most of her critical work on Boito to unravelling the latter's supposed esotericism, affirms that when dealing with Boito's texts one has to take into account two interpretative levels: a first and evident one, which can be called parodist, and another one that can be considered as symbolist-esoteric.<sup>49</sup>

What complicates the study of *Re Orso* is Boito's contradictory behaviour as regards the fairy tale and the other works of his Scapigliatura period. Particularly keen on his reputation after his rebellious phase with Scapigliatura, in 1875 Boito endorsed the idea of *Re Orso* as being a worthless piece of literature by defining the fairy tale as a 'matta cosa', a 'stramberia poetica, perdonabile a vent'anni, a trenta meno' (letter to Agostino Salina of 8 July 1875, Lett., p. 33). Nevertheless, the central place of tragic themes at the heart of grotesque and macabre scenes, the substantial amount of work carried out by Boito that led to four different editions with numerous variants (1864, 1873, 1877, and 1902, the last two together with *Il libro dei versi*), and his constant and active interest in *Re Orso* throughout his life definitely contradict his statement to Agostino Salina.

In *Re Orso*, Boito utilises the Romantic genre of the fairy tale, and the most evident (albeit superficial) source of the *poemetto* is, I would argue, the much admired Hugo, yet not the Hugo of 'L'Épopée du ver' that, together with Poe's 'The Conqueror Worm', has been generally associated with *Re Orso*.<sup>50</sup> I am referring to the tale 'Légende du beau Pécopin et de la belle Bauldour' included in *Le Rhin*, a little-known collection of travel stories first published in 1842. Boito declares his debt to this tale in the first of the four letters sent to Hugo, the one dated 23

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<sup>48</sup> 'Le sperimentazioni poetiche di Boito', p. 7.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. 'Introduzione', pp. 15-21.

<sup>50</sup> See Riccardo Viagante, *Arrigo Boito: 'un caduto chérubo' poeta e musicista* (Palermo: L'Epos, 2008), p. 98.

December 1864, with which he also sent *Re Orso*: ‘Quando per generosità [...] leggerete [*Re Orso*] fate di non ricordarvi quel incantato *conte bleu* che ideaste sotto le rovine del Falkenburg in quel bell’agosto del 1838’.<sup>51</sup> This can only be the ‘conte-bleu’ that Hugo claimed to have written under the ‘sombres ruines du Falkenburg’,<sup>52</sup> namely the ‘Légende du beau Pécopin et de la belle Bauldour’. Primarily, *Re Orso* shares with this latter the imaginary medieval setting, the use of historical facts within the fairy tale,<sup>53</sup> the theme of travel,<sup>54</sup> and creatures belonging to both mythical and religious lore, such as giants and, more prominently, Satan and his demons.<sup>55</sup> However, if the two works similarly combine a supernatural and sinister world, which generally belonged to the dark strain of Romanticism, with elements from fairy tales and fables, they significantly diverge in the treatment of this material. As Jean Gaudon affirmed, “‘Pécopin’ is no place for the horrible or mysterious’, since in ‘Pécopin’ Hugo follows ‘the gentler path of fantasy’.<sup>56</sup> Hugo does not deal with metaphysical subjects clothed in allegory or concealed by symbols, unlike Boito; in ‘Pécopin’, the Devil does not represent the terrible yet irresistible forces of evil but is a character with vices and weaknesses for whom the reader can even feel

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<sup>51</sup> Repr. in Remo Giazotto, ‘Hugo, Boito e gli “scapigliati”’, *L’Approdo letterario*, no. 3, (July-Sept 1958), p. 39.

<sup>52</sup> *Le Rhin*, in *Œuvres complètes: Voyages*, ed. by Jacques Seebacher and Guy Rosa (Paris: Laffront, 1987), p. 164.

<sup>53</sup> In the Lettre XXVI of *Le Rhin*, p. 252, Hugo described ‘la fable et l’histoire’ as ‘ces deux arbres, plus semblables qu’on ne pense, dont les racines et les rameaux sont parfois si inextricablement mêlés dans la mémoire des hommes!’.

<sup>54</sup> ‘Pécopin’ is focused on the protagonist’s one-hundred-year journey around the world in his attempt to return to his betrothed, Bauldour. Cf. chapter VIII of ‘Pécopin’ (Hugo, pp. 178-180) and Boito’s description of *Re Orso*’s one-hundred-year journey in ‘Confessione’ (OL, p. 124), as well as the ‘Viaggio d’un verme’ (OL, pp. 132-136).

<sup>55</sup> Some resemblances between characters in *Re Orso* and ‘Pécopin’ are noteworthy, such as those between the seemingly infernal jester Papiol, a ‘nano / Gobbo, rossiccio e strano [...] Dalle gambette storte’ who ‘Parve surgir dal suol’ (OL, pp. 95-96, ll. 56-58), and the Devil disguised as a ‘petit homme bossu, boiteux et fort laid’ with a ‘jambe difforme’, whom Pécopin see ‘s’enfoncer en terre comme une vrille’ (Hugo, pp. 196-197).

<sup>56</sup> ‘Introduction’, in Victor Hugo, *Le Rhin*, ed. by Jean Gaudon and Sheila Gaudon (London: Harrap, 1962), p. 30.

compassion.<sup>57</sup> In spite of the unpleasant ending of the story, Hugo's educational and edifying intent is evident in the philosophical words of the birds that conclude the tale,<sup>58</sup> which stand opposite Boito's moral detachment in 'Morale della fiaba'. Hugo's characteristic morality and pity towards the oppressed, described by Baudelaire as an '*esprit de justice et de charité*' and as an obsession apropos the 'goût de la réhabilitation' ('*Les Misérables* par Victor Hugo', OC II, pp. 218-219),<sup>59</sup> is also present in 'Pécopin'.

Without discussing here the complex feelings Baudelaire had towards Hugo's work or towards the dichotomy between 'l'art pour l'art' and utilitarian poetry, it has to be taken into account that, in the 'Notes nouvelles sur Edgar Poe', which Boito and Praga probably had in mind when defining Scapigliatura as an 'arte di decadenza', Baudelaire passionately opposed the idea of didactic poetry, and discusses Hugo's faults and mistakes as regards this notion. Baudelaire paraphrases from Poe's 'Poetic principle', and defines what he considers as the 'hérésie de *l'enseignement*': the final objective should be to write a poem 'uniquement pour le plaisir d'écrire un poème' (OC II, p. 328), and Hugo 'n'a pu se faire pardonner son génie lyrique qu'en introduisant de force et brutalement dans sa poésie ce qu'Edgar Poe considèrerait comme l'hérésie moderne capitale, – *l'enseignement*' (OC II, p. 337). This idea of 'poésie pure' (OC II, p. 337), and the criticism of Hugo's didacticism are taken up by Praga in the abovementioned article 'L'esposizione di Belle Arti: lettere e divagazioni', in which Praga appropriates Baudelaire's artistic principles, turning them into 'dissertazioni scapigliate sull'arte', and affirms:

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<sup>57</sup> See, for instance, the compassionate depiction of the Devil in chapter VI, p. 175, in which Hugo claims that 'Le diable a des vices; [...] Il est gourmand'.

<sup>58</sup> See *Voyages*, p. 280.

<sup>59</sup> In his 1862 review of *Les Misérables*, Baudelaire also affirms that in the novel 'la morale entre directement à titre de but' (OC II, p. 218).

lo scopo, il profitto, l'*insegnamento*, sono le camicie di forza a cui vorrebbero condannarla [l'arte] i pedanti. Baudelaire [...] giunge a dire che Hugo non ha potuto farsi perdonare il suo lirismo che soggiogandolo alla missione dell'ammaestramento; ciò che, secondo il poeta dei *Fiori del male*, è la sovrana pecca del grande maestro.<sup>60</sup>

That is why Rodolfo Quadrelli declared Hugo, with his progressive and educational purposes, only as the 'maestro *apparente*' of the poets of Scapigliatura, despite the evident influence on Boito, Praga, and Camerana, and named Baudelaire instead as their veritable model.<sup>61</sup> Baudelaire's freedom towards morality entailed the possibility of dealing with any kind of material, even the most indecent and vulgar, without the limits imposed by moral messages. Baudelaire described his *Fleurs* as a 'misérable dictionnaire de mélancolie et de crime' ('Première version de la dédicace', OC I, p. 187), and a 'livre saturnien, / Orgiaque et mélancolique' ('Épigraphe pour un livre condamné', OC I, p. 137, ll. 3-4); his aim was to 'extraire la *beauté* du Mal', as he claims in the first of his projects of prefaces (OC I, p. 181).

The conclusion of *Re Orso* excludes any easy moralism, particularly regarding the life of the degenerate protagonist, and can be seen as a polemical statement against the didactic – and often redemptive – endings of many Romantic works, especially in the Italian tradition. These are characterised by a well-defined religious or patriotic morality that influences the story as well as the behaviour of the characters, who strive for an ultimate sublimation through religion or an idealised idea of 'motherland'.<sup>62</sup> Against this conception of moralistic art, Boito's definition of

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<sup>60</sup> *La pubblicistica nel periodo della Scapigliatura*, ed. by Giuseppe Farinelli, p. 1053.

<sup>61</sup> 'Poesia e verità nel primo Boito', in Arrigo Boito, *Poesie e racconti*, ed. by Rodolfo Quadrelli (Milan: Mondadori, 1981), p. 7.

<sup>62</sup> The most significant work of this kind in nineteenth-century Italy is, undoubtedly, Alessandro Manzoni's *I promessi sposi*, first published in 1827. Many of the Scapigliati, including Boito and Praga, were, at least in their period with Scapigliatura, 'antimanzoniani', refusing Manzoni's moralistic and religious lesson. See Renzo Negri, ed., *Il 'Vegliardo' e gli 'Antecristi': studi su Manzoni e la Scapigliatura* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1978).

‘Realismo’, as discussed in the previous section of this chapter, entails an utter detachment from morality in order to portray the totality of reality without discrimination.

That Boito considered Baudelaire to be the leading representative of what he defined as *realism* has already been noted, and the peculiar treatment of themes linked to the notion of excess that Baudelaire introduced into poetry, in order to depict the dualistic condition of the human being, certainly influenced *Re Orso*. In particular, the *Fleurs du Mal* provided Boito with a source of modern material for his aesthetic portrayal of various types of excess, related to overconsumption, intoxication, debauchery, ennui, rebelliousness towards religion, eroticism, moral and physical corruption and, most significantly, the perpetual presence of evil. Baudelaire’s example, however, not only demonstrated the possibility of new and modern subjects but also reintroduced into poetry the substantial use of medieval-like allegories centred upon animality and death, and marked by the ‘monstrueuse copulation du grotesque et de l’horrible’.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, Baudelaire made extensive use of language linked to bodily decomposition popular in Baroque poetry – the profundity of his Baroque vocabulary is unique in nineteenth-century poetry, even when compared to his contemporary ‘Frénétiques’, who certainly influenced him,<sup>64</sup> or to the other writer that, in the same period, widely employed Baroque expressions, namely Gautier.<sup>65</sup> That is why Boito, whose *Re Orso* was written in the same year as the proclamation of Scapigliatura’s theoretical notion of an ill, decadent, Baroque,

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<sup>63</sup> Labarthe, *Baudelaire et la tradition de l’allégorie*, p. 34.

<sup>64</sup> John E. Jackson, *La Mort Baudelaire: essai sur ‘Les Fleurs du Mal’* (Neuchâtel: La Baconnière, 1982), p. 54.

<sup>65</sup> According to Jackson, p. 30, Baudelaire believes that Gautier’s propensity for traditional and Platonic beauty prevented him from achieving a real depiction of ugliness, in spite of works such as *La Comédie de la Mort*.



and ultimately realist art that is oxymoronically based on the reverie, regarded Baudelaire as one of his principal mentors.

## **2.1 Rotten Worlds, Bestial Vices: the Allegorical Menagerie of ‘Antiche storie’**

The extract of Baudelaire’s poem ‘Le Voyage VI’ employed as epigraph to this second section of our chapter on Boito best summarises the various themes treated in *Re Orso*: the figure of the woman as a cold and prideful slave to her husband; man considered as a gluttonous, lascivious, and greedy tyrant; the presence of power, blood, feasts, executioners, and martyrs; and, above all, the dreadful ‘spectacle ennuyeux de l’immortel péché’ (OC I, p. 132, l. 88). In *Re Orso*, these themes are contextualised in a fictional setting, where the main characters are Re Orso the tyrant, Oliba the slave-wife, Papiol the jester, Trol the giant executioner, the Provencal minstrel (and suicidal martyr of love), as well as the worm and many other animals that constitute the equivalent of a medieval *bestiarium*. The persistent use of various types of beasts in *Re Orso* – of which some have anthropomorphic features and can speak – expands the boundaries of the fairy tale through an embrace of customary elements of the fable.

The infernal and vicious scenery of ‘Antiche storie’, the opening chapter of the *poemetto*, portrays Crete as a rotten realm of violence and debauchery. In its amalgamation of noble and prosaic language, mixture of fantastic and realist descriptions, combination of grotesque and gruesome images, and presence of Christian (particularly Satanic) allegories in the form of various beasts, ‘Antiche storie’ finds its precedent in ‘Au lecteur’, the opening poem that acts as preface to the *Fleurs du Mal*. ‘Au lecteur’ (OC I, pp. 5-6) sets the tone for the whole collection,

and describes an epicurean and depraved world:

La sottise, l'erreur, le péché, la lésine,  
Occupent nos esprits et travaillent nos corps,  
Et nous alimentons nos aimables remords,  
Comme les mendiants nourrissent leur vermine.

[...]

Sur l'oreiller du mal c'est Satan Trismégiste  
Qui berce longuement notre esprit enchanté,  
Et le riche métal de notre volonté  
Est tout vaporisé par ce savant chimiste.

[...]

Si le viol, le poison, le poignard, l'incendie,  
N'ont pas encor brodé de leurs plaisants dessins  
Le canevas banal de nos piteux destins,  
C'est que notre âme, hélas! n'est pas assez hardie.

Mais parmi les chacals, les panthères, les lices,  
Les singes, les scorpions, les vautours, les serpents,  
Les monstres glapissants, hurlants, grognants, rampants,  
Dans la ménagerie infâme de nos vices,

Il en est un plus laid, plus méchant, plus immonde!  
Quoiqu'il ne pousse ni grands gestes ni grands cris,  
Il ferait volontiers de la terre un débris  
Et dans un bâillement avalerait le monde;

C'est l'Ennui! – L'œil chargé d'un pleur involontaire,  
Il rêve d'échafauds en fumant son houka.  
Tu le connais, lecteur, ce monstre délicat,  
– Hypocrite lecteur, – mon semblable, – mon frère! (ll. 1-4, 9-12, 25-40)

Here Baudelaire highlights the human being's utter submission to Satan, pointing out the tight connections between pleasure, violence, and the natural disposition to sin, inasmuch as rape and other types of violence seem to be the likely next step, if someone is audacious enough, in the wake of constant practice of vice. As Labarthe remarks, panthers, serpents, vultures, and the other 'monstres' mentioned in 'Au lecteur', which are seven like the cardinal sins, have to be considered as 'la "corporification" des vices humains', with panthers that, for instance, symbolise

lust.<sup>66</sup> The connection between Satan and the animal side of the human being is also underlined by Baudelaire in other writings, such as in the intimate diary *Mon cœur mis à nu*, where he writes that ‘Il y a dans tout homme, à toute heure, deux postulations simultanées, l’une vers Dieu, l’autre vers Satan. L’invocation à Dieu, ou spiritualité, est un désir de monter en grade; celle de Satan, ou animalité, est une joie de descendre’ (OC I, pp. 682-683). In the *Fleurs* Baudelaire’s bestiary, theologically derived from a medieval tradition, though devoid of that tradition’s notion of Redemption,<sup>67</sup> allegorically represents the animalistic features of the human being and occasionally deploys elements that commonly belong to the fable. After all, as Labarthe again affirms, ‘Le réalisme baudelairien ne saurait appréhender la vie qu’au niveau même où errent et meurent les bêtes, dans l’expérience commune d’une aveugle et pesante matière’.<sup>68</sup>

The menagerie of ‘Au lecteur’ is analogous to that utilised by Boito in ‘Antiche storie’ (OL, pp. 93-94), in which the king enjoys spending time:

Un serraglio di belve ed un di donne  
Nudria nella sua reggia ed ei nell’uno  
Passava i giorni, nell’altro le notti. (ll. 15-18)

Re Orso is the king of a ‘Terra di mostri e di delitti’ (l. 4), to wit Crete, the ‘maledetta / Per l’amor di Pasife isola infame’ (ll. 2-3). According to Greek mythology Pasiphae, wife of King Minos of Crete, copulated with a bull in order to satisfy her lust, hence giving birth to the Minotaur, and the reference to her name at the beginning of *Re Orso* indicates the animality of the king’s domain, taking into account that Re Orso is called ‘Minotauro’ in ‘La cena’, another section of the fairy

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<sup>66</sup> Baudelaire *et la tradition de l’allégorie*, pp. 508-509.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 469.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., pp. 469-470.

tale (OL, p. 111, l. 79). In ‘Antiche storie’, Re Orso divides his time between wild beasts and women, both embodying carnal vice:

Alle jene venia col crin spruzzato  
D’olio di nardo e co’ lascivi odori  
Del suo letto d’avorio ed alle donne  
Redia col leppo delle sozze jene  
E lordo il volto pe’ sanguigni baci  
Della pantera [...]. (ll. 20-24)

The oxymoronic juxtaposition of perfumes and stench, or more precisely of the two situations in which one clearly mirrors the other, implies a combination of pleasure, lechery, and bestiality with hyenas and panthers representing lust and sexual perversion. Furthermore, the vulture that ‘Per biēca natura’ (l. 27) steals lambs, gold, and gems for the enjoyment of the monarch plainly symbolises Re Orso’s greed. In the fairy tale, a significant place is given to the serpent, the despot’s favourite animal, which assists him in the rape of his second wife Oliba, and is notoriously the embodiment of Satanic temptation and original sin. The name ‘Re Orso’, namely *king bear* in Italian, refers to an animal that has been associated with wrath and violence since ancient times,<sup>69</sup> and adds another capital sin to those already attributed to the king. Even though Re Orso’s actions become progressively crueller and more violent, at the beginning of the fairy tale Boito’s antihero is already a constant sinner living in a vicious world, dedicated to the excess of what Baudelaire calls ‘la ménagerie infâme de nos vices’ represented by exotic and dangerous beasts.

In ‘Antiche Storie’, Boito describes Re Orso as a heavy drinker as well. This is consistent with the prelude to the story, the ‘Esordio’ (OL, p. 89), where the

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<sup>69</sup> Cf. Michel Feuillet, *Lexique des symboles chrétiens*, 3rd edn (Paris: PUF, 2009), p. 77.

narrator warns the immoral ‘frati godenti’ – gluttonous and slothful monks who used to relish a materialistic lifestyle – to be afraid of reading the fairy tale. In the ‘Esordio’, whilst specifically addressing readers who might be disturbed by the contents of *Re Orso*, the speaker also previews two of the main topics of the story, namely evil in the form of the ‘*eterno Avversiero*’ (l. 4), Satan, and corporal vices, particularly gluttony and sloth:

O cherci, o canonaci – o frati godenti,  
Attoniti al libero – volar degli eventi,  
Se il desco v’inebria – se il chilo vi piace,  
Se odiate le chiacchiere – che turban la pace,  
Temete di leggere – la pagina orrenda  
Di questa leggenda! (ll. 7-12)

Taking into account this warning, it is no wonder that in ‘Antiche storie’ *Re Orso*’s behaviour appears to be the result of an indolent lifestyle, dedicated to nothing else but opulence, intoxication, and lust.

## 2.2 Sloth, *Ennui*, and Images of Death

Taking into account *Re Orso*’s slothful, hedonistic, and ultimately sinful regime, it is not surprising that in ‘Antiche storie’ there is also place for a Baudelairian conception of ennui. If Baudelaire defined ennui as the father of all vices in ‘Au lecteur’, capable of causing death and devastation (‘Il ferait volontiers de la terre un débris’; ‘Il rêve d’échafauds en fumant son houka’), Boito gives boredom an important role in ‘Antiche storie’, linked to *Re Orso*’s many depravities. The king, while intoxicated, ‘afferra, / Mosso da noia o da delirio, il crine / Di Mirra sua, sōave amor, [...] e col pugnale / Orribilmente le schianta la testa’ (ll. 50-54). This is the first homicide shown in the story, and the narrator considers either boredom or

madness as the possible cause of Re Orso's brutal action, thus implicitly placing them on the same level of danger and subtly emphasising the destructive powers of ennui, which in *Re Orso* has a strong connection with violence and death. The day after Mirra's murder, Re Orso 'sentì cruccio [...] Del tetro caso' (ll. 55-56): that is to say, he feels anguish and remorse for having killed his first wife. Re Orso starts hearing the refrain '*Re Orso / Ti schermi / Dal morso / De' vermi*' in the first of the three sections entitled 'Incubo', which depicts the king's angst and terror, and comes after Mirra's murder in 'Antiche storie'. Therefore, it seems that the voice of remorse is specifically intertwined with (and originates from) this last cruel act, perpetrated by Re Orso while intoxicated and caused by 'noia o da delirio'.

Emanuele d'Angelo has recently underlined Boito's peculiar conception of 'noia' in the latter's operatic tragedies, which is linked to the notion of existential pessimism and has to be considered 'dantescamente e boccaccianamente' as "dolore", "pena", "tormento", "dispiacere".<sup>70</sup> It is certainly possible to extend this definition of 'noia' to the various poems in the *Libro dei versi* in which Boito discusses his 'tetro / Tedio' ('Dualismo', OL, p. 53, ll. 26-27) or 'tedio eterno' ('Poiché ho l'anima cupa...', OL, p. 81, l. 6) and, considering the connections between boredom, anguish, and death, also to *Re Orso*. Baudelairian ennui is a constant presence in Boito's *poemetto*, and it is an active part of Re Orso's sufferings: the latter's attempts to suffocate the frightful refrain by means of savage drinking and orgies have a well-defined connection to boredom. The king's pursuit of shallow happiness through debauchery is evident in *Re Orso*, particularly when, trying to convince Oliba to have sexual intercourse, the king affirms: 'L'ansante tuo

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<sup>70</sup> 'Falstaff "dans les jardins du Décaméron": Boito mediterraneizza Shakespeare', in *La vera storia ci narra: Verdi narrateur – Verdi narratore*, ed. by Camillo Faverzani (Lucca: LIM, 2014), p. 334.

petto m'innondi di gioia!' (OL, p. 98, l. 41); or when a drunken Re Orso claims, after having brutally slayed his second wife Oliba: 'Voglio bestemmie ed orgie [*sic*]! – vo' che si cionchi e rida!' (OL, p. 113, l. 181).

Before Boito, Baudelaire had already utilised the whole extent of the term 'ennui' in the *Fleurs*, binding it to the notion of 'spleen'. If ennui is considered a product of sloth or, more precisely, a 'fruit de la morne incuriosité' in 'Spleen' (LXXVI) (OC I, p. 73, l. 17), in the very same poem it is also described as a feeling of 'vague épouvante' (l. 20), and in 'Spleen' (LXXVIII) as an 'Angoisse atroce' (OC I, p. 75, l. 19). In Baudelaire's poems, ennui is 'un emblème monstrueux de notre "animalité"', and it is often linked to 'l'aspect corporel de l'homme et à la lourdeur de son existence matérielle'.<sup>71</sup> Ferdinando D. Maurino noticed the similarities between Boito's and Baudelaire's conceptions of boredom, as well as its prominence in *Re Orso*, in his 1981 essay 'Boito and Baudelaire', even though he did not elaborate his thought further: 'The theme of "ennui" or "noia" [...] makes its grand and *sostenuto* appearance in *Re Orso*, second only to Baudelaire'.<sup>72</sup>

The many implications of a broader notion of ennui, entwined with anguish and torment, in *Re Orso* can be investigated further by juxtaposing Boito's king with the evil monarch portrayed by Baudelaire in 'Spleen' (LXXVII). After all, 'The figure of the indifferent or cruel prince is fundamental in Baudelaire, recurring in 'le roi d'un pays pluvieux' of "Spleen" (LXXVII)',<sup>73</sup> but also in the prose poem 'Une mort héroïque', published for the first time in October 1863 and then gathered in 1869 in *Le Spleen de Paris* (OC I, pp. 319-323). In 'Spleen' (LXXVII) (OC I, p. 74),

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<sup>71</sup> Margery Vibe Skagen, 'Ennui vs mélancolie', in *'Les Fleurs du mal': actes du colloque de la Sorbonne, des 10 et 11 janvier 2003*, ed. by André Guyaux and Bertrand Marchal (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2003), p. 248.

<sup>72</sup> 'Boito and Baudelaire', *Forum Italicum*, vol. 21, no. 1 (Spring 1987), p. 94, note 6.

<sup>73</sup> J. A. Hiddleston, *Baudelaire and the Art of Memory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), p. 64.

Baudelaire compares himself to a fairy-tale-like king of a rainy country overcome by ennui, a cruel and sadistic ‘malade’ (l. 8) whom nothing can make happy, not even ‘ses chiens comme [...] d’autres bêtes’ nor ‘son peuple mourant en face du balcon’ (ll. 4, 6). Here all the main elements of a classic fairy tale are present, but these are grotesquely transfigured by the distressing tone of the poem and the use of a macabre vocabulary, such as ‘tombeau’ (l. 9), ‘squelette’ (l. 12), and ‘cadavre’ (l. 17), as in Boito’s *Re Orso*. Baudelaire’s miserable king, like Boito’s, surrounds himself with gold, grotesque jesters, beasts, and lewd women that should help him fight ennui, but unlike in *Re Orso* these dramatically fail. In *Re Orso*, Boito takes the cue from some of the images displayed in Baudelaire’s poem, and charges them with an additional feeling of terror caused by the frightening voice. When Baudelaire describes the ornamented bed of his king that ‘fleurdelisé se transforme en tombeau’ (l. 9), he does so in order to emphasise affliction originating in the poetic subject’s incapability to counteract ennui. On the contrary, in the case of Boito’s king his richly decorated bed metaphorically transmutes into a coffin only because he hears the refrain he dreads:

Ed ora è notte. Vigila  
 Il Re sul regio letto.  
 D’oro, di bisso e porpora  
 È il morbido guancial;  
 Pur atterrito e livido  
 Ha il Re del cataletto  
 La posa funeral. (OL, p. 95, ll. 8-14)

Furthermore, Baudelaire underlines the powerlessness of his king by claiming that in that ‘cadavre hébété [...] coule au lieu de sang l’eau verte du Léthé’ (ll. 17-18), whereas the much more active *Re Orso* voluntarily throws himself into pleasure and debauchery, and finally seeks the source of the Lethe, not only to escape boredom but also to eradicate the voice that is haunting him (OL, p. 124, ll. 65-68).



‘Antiche storie’, with its focus on mortal sins, ennui and, as shall be discussed further on, the profane juxtaposition of sacredness with sensuality, is the veritable introduction to *Re Orso*, in the same fashion as ‘Preludio’ acts as preface to Praga’s *Penombre*, written in the same year and characterised by many Baudelairian echoes, particularly from ‘Au lecteur’ and ‘À une Madone’:

O nemico lettor, canto la Noia,  
l’eredità del dubbio e dell’ignoto,  
il tuo re, il tuo pontefice, il tuo boia,  
il tuo cielo, e il tuo loto!

Canto litane di martire e d’empio;  
canto gli amori dei sette peccati  
che mi stanno nel cor, come in un tempio,  
inginocchiati. (PP, pp. 83-84, ll. 17-24)

In ‘Au lecteur’ Baudelaire describes the constant threat of ‘l’Ennui’ by portraying it with anthropomorphic features and linking it to the image of the scaffold (‘II rêve d’échafauds en fumant son houka’), and similarly Praga emphasises the deadly features of ‘la Noia’, with an allegorising capital letter unquestionably drawn from Baudelaire, by making it rhyme with, as well as defining it as, ‘boia’ in ‘Preludio’. Furthermore, in ‘À une Madone’ Baudelaire had already associated religious love and the Romantic image of the heart with the blasphemous notion of seven cardinal sins:

Enfin, pour compléter ton rôle de Marie,  
Et pour mêler l’amour avec la barbarie,  
Volupté noire! des sept Péchés capitaux,  
Bourreau plein de remords, je ferai sept Couteaux  
Bien affilés, et [...]  
Je les planterai tous dans ton Cœur pantelant. (OC I, p. 59, ll. 37-41, 43)

In ‘I sette peccati mortali (Quadro di Ernesto Ewald)’ published in the *Museo di famiglia* a few months after completing *Re Orso*, one of the very few art reviews he

ever wrote, Boito discusses the seven deadly sins and connects sloth to the scaffold, hence underscoring its lethal powers. Despite admittedly praising the allegorical painting, Boito observes that the sins are not allegorised in a classic sense, they are rather represented by the sinners themselves, and this means the picture cannot be considered a proper allegory (TS, p. 1280). In his review, Boito also asserts that sloth is the cause of all other sins, and ‘porta perciò con se la condanna e la vergogna di tutti, ed è personificato in un ribaldo ladrone o assassino che cammina al supplizio; [...] il carnefice lo precede’ (TS, p. 1280).

### **2.3 Gluttony and the Worm: Allegories for Moral and Physical Corruption**

In his article on ‘I sette peccati mortali’, Boito seems to place gluttony, characterised by overindulgence in wine and food, alongside sloth as the worst cardinal sins by indenting and emphasising the following phrase: ‘il dannoso peccato della gola’ (TS, p. 1280). By highlighting the dangers of gluttony and sloth, in this review Boito conveys the same thought as the one behind the warning to the immoral monks of the section ‘Esordio’ in *Re Orso*. In the fairy tale there are numerous references to food and drink, particularly to their excessive consumption, depicted with Boito’s irregular – and very much Baudelairian – combination of terms belonging to different registers, as seen in Chapter I.1.3 with the poem ‘Case nuove’. The section ‘La cena’, which describes the feast following the marriage between Oliba and Re Orso, is not only the grotesque and gruesome climax of the fairy tale, but also a depiction of the sordidness of Re Orso’s domain, expressed by means of the nouns, adjectives, and verbs that refer to eating and drinking. Alongside archaic terms such as ‘mappe’ (in its Latin signification, meaning ‘napkins’), ‘ciati / Murrini’, ‘gobbole’,

‘ramora’, ‘cervogia’, ‘lagène’, ‘loriche’, there is place for everyday words related to feasting such as ‘pasticcio’, ‘succhia’, ‘rode’, ‘divorar’, ‘tracanna’, ‘morso’, ‘trincia’, ‘mascelle’ (OL, pp. 110-111).

The juxtaposition of archaic and prosaic words creates, often in the same line, a bizarre association between unpleasant and highly poetic images, such as in ‘Le immonde labbra stillano – il miel sulle loriche’ (OL, p. 111, l. 106), or ‘e sulle curve forme / Dell’aurea tazza ei specchiasi – più orribile e deforme’ (OL, p. 110, l. 66). This stylistic technique, employed to enhance the force of the semantic oppositions and to experiment with prosaic language in a poetic context, is also present in Baudelaire’s work. In ‘Au lecteur’, for instance, Baudelaire writes: ‘Aux objets répugnants nous trouvons des appas’ (OC I, p. 5, l. 14). The noun ‘appas’ clashes with the word *repugnant*, and the dissonance is enhanced by the fact that ‘appas’ is a term belonging to the literary register, and ‘répugnants’ is a prosaic adjective that denotes unpleasantness. In a similar manner to ‘La cena’, in order to portray a world characterised by gluttony and materialism, in ‘Au lecteur’ Baudelaire depicts vice with a vocabulary related to food, a ‘semantic field marked as distinctly unpoetic’, as Carol de Dobay Rifelj has demonstrated.<sup>74</sup> Placed next to an archaic and exotic lexicon containing rare words such as ‘lésine’, ‘Trismégiste’, ‘appas’, ‘helminthes’, ‘lices’, ‘houka’, are ordinary terms connected to eating such as ‘alimentons’, ‘nourrissent’, ‘grassement’ (derived from ‘gras’), ‘mange’, ‘vieille orange’, ‘ribote’ (which denotes excessive consumption of food and drinks), ‘avalerait’, and ‘délicat’ (OC I, pp. 5-6). ‘Au lecteur’ is one of the many poems of the *Fleurs* in which Baudelaire employs a vocabulary that refers to eating and drinking: in ‘L’Horloge’,

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<sup>74</sup> ‘Baudelaire: De quelle boue?’, pp. 71-72.

the picturesque reference to food is clear when the speaker declares the ruthlessness of time: ‘Chaque instant te dévore un morceau du délice / À chaque homme accordé pour toute sa saison’ (OC I, p. 81, ll. 7-8). In ‘Le Reniement de Saint Pierre’, the poet represents God as a gluttonous tyrant, ‘Comme un tyran gorgé de viande et de vins’ (OC I, p. 121, l. 3); the same image is used in ‘Le Voyage VI’ to depict the tragic situation of the man, described as a ‘tyran goulou’ (OC I, p. 132, l. 91).

In *Re Orso*, gluttony, like ennui, has a strong connection to death: Trol the executioner is a ‘lurco gigante’ (OL, p. 96, l. 56), both ‘cuoco e boja / Strangola e scuoja; [...] / Dà vita e morte’ (OL, p. 107, ll. 21-22, 25). This link is also visible in the scene of Papiol’s reward in ‘La cena’, when the latter must (and definitely wants to) eat a ‘pasticcio’ (OL, p. 114, l. 201) that ultimately becomes the instrument of his death (ll. 200-209). In this section, numerous are the references to excessive consumption and voracity, such as in the following scenes: ‘Re Orso empie e tracanna – tre tazze e poi tre tazze’ (OL, p. 111, l. 98); and ‘Ciarlano i Conti e rodono; – sì rozza è in lor la fame / Ch’essi alternano il morso – del dente a quel dell’ugna’ (ll. 102-103). Alongside constant reference to *Re Orso*’s drinking and intoxication, Boito includes four different ‘odes to wine’ recited by the king, who tries to convince Oliba to drink by declaiming the properties of the various wines, which can make the drinker experience guilt or desire oblivion and death, among other things. As we shall see in Chapter II.1.7, in *Tavolozza* and *Penombre Praga* dedicates various poems to wine and drunkenness too, drawing primarily from Baudelaire’s ‘Le Vin’, a section of the *Fleurs* where the latter describes the effects of overconsumption of wine on people that use it for different purposes – including fighting ennui and looking for ecstasy or death (see OC I, pp. 105-110). Baudelaire’s

influence is also clearly present in Boito's 'odes to wine', particularly in the passage where Re Orso associates wine with pride in a Satanic (and Faustian) attempt to become like God. Baudelaire writes in 'Le Vin du solitaire', discussing the powers of wine: 'Tu lui verses [...] l'orgueil, [...] Qui nous rend triomphants et semblables aux Dieux!' (OC I, p. 109, ll. 12-14). Boito's verses, on the other hand, are the following: 'Vin di Scio! vin di Scio! vin di Scio! / [...] Questo è un vin che fa simili a Dio!' (OL, p. 112, ll. 130, 132). Re Orso recites this verse just before killing the worm – his true enemy – hence while feeling triumphant and proud that he finally managed to slay it. Pride, like the other sins, is a means of self-destruction. In the chapter 'Confessione', entirely dedicated to Re Orso's confession to a Satanic monk on his deathbed, after having murdered all the banqueters at his wedding feast as well as all the people in his kingdom – and the narrator again blames drunkenness, together with the mysterious voice, for that (see OL, p. 121, ll. 18-30; p. 123, ll. 11-18) – the king claims that he remained alone like a 'Dio decaduto' (OL, p. 124, l. 54), a prideful God that has lost everything.

Allusions to gluttony are scattered throughout the fairy tale, and are occasionally accompanied by a strong anti-clerical and anti-Catholic feeling. Besides the 'Esordio', where monks are described as gluttons and epicureans, the poet associates Catholic ministers with gluttony in the chapter 'Viaggio d'un verme'. During its journey to Re Orso's tomb, in order to cross the sea the worm hides in the pocket of an obese priest 'dall'ampia epiderme' (OL, p. 133, l. 66), which 'sapea di salsiccia' (OL, p. 134, l. 75). In *Re Orso*, gluttony not only has ties with anti-clericalism but is also represented by means of a symbolism that draws heavily on Christian lore. Without taking into account the esoteric and Gnostic symbolism that,

according to Villa, is supposedly displayed in the fairy tale and ultimately defines *Re Orso*,<sup>75</sup> the presence of references to Christian culture is undeniable. Beelzebub, the prince of devils from the Gospel of Matthew, considered by Dante Alighieri as simply another name to refer to Lucifer in the *Divina Commedia*,<sup>76</sup> is a recurring character in the fairy tale, disguised first as the confessional monk and then as a knight. In these two different passages of *Re Orso*, Boito describes the disappearance of Beelzebub, from the dress of the monk and the armour of the knight, in the following manner:

Rimase il guscio  
Della castagna,  
E Belzebù  
Mangiò il marron,  
Ch'era un dimon. (OL, p. 128, ll. 109-112; p. 131, ll. 96-101)

This other reference to eating is not casual: Beelzebub was quite commonly considered to be the demon representing gluttony in medieval Christian demonology.<sup>77</sup> The final chapter of the fairy tale entitled 'Lo spettro', where *Re Orso* has eventually become a ghost who oxymoronically is also a corpse, seems to confirm the prominence of this cardinal sin in *Re Orso*. This characterisation of *Re Orso* as simultaneously a ghost and a corpse implicates a double corruption, on a moral and a physical level:

Son sette secoli, – che a mezzanotte,  
Appena scoccano – dodici botte

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<sup>75</sup> 'Introduzioni e note', pp. 441-442.

<sup>76</sup> In the following lines from *Inferno* XXXIV, Dante uses the name 'Belzubù' to indicate Lucifer: 'Luogo è là giù da Belzebù remoto / tanto quanto la tomba si distende, / che non per vista, ma per suono è noto | d'un ruscelletto'. *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata*, ed. by Giorgio Petrocchi (Turin: Einaudi, 1975), p. 141, ll. 127-130.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. 'Demon' in *Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of World Religions*, ed. by Wendy Doniger (Springfield: Merriam-Webster, 1999), p. 287. See also Rossell Hope Robbins, *The Encyclopedia of Witchcraft and Demonology* (London: Nevill, 1959), p. 127.

Sull'orìuol,

Passa un fantasima [...]

Gli rode un vermine – palato e lingua;  
Pur sul suo scheletro – par non s'estingua  
La carne ancor. (OL, p. 139, ll. 1-4, 13-15)

The depiction of the macabre scene with terms related to both putrefaction and feeding, such as 'rode' and 'carne' or, more importantly, the image of the worm – already employed in 'Dualismo' to depict the material and corruptible side of the human being<sup>78</sup> – that gnaws Re Orso's tongue and palate, namely the main symbols of the sense of taste, define Re Orso's grotesque post-mortem punishment. The king has endured this punishment for the past seven centuries, in a sort of Dantean infernal 'contrappasso' that delineates his sufferings for having dedicated his life to the pleasure of carnal vices, without listening to the voice of remorse that continually threatened him for his moral corruption: '*Re Orso / Ti schermi / Dal morso / De' vermi*'. The role of gluttony and lust as Re Orso's main vices is confirmed in the chapter 'Litania', a Satanic litany recited by the abovementioned monk, where alongside the names of several demons Boito lists the following sins, including wrath:

*Gula.*  
*Luxuria.*  
*Ira.* (OL, p. 127, ll. 75-77)

The association between remorse and the symbol of the worm is utterly intentional: a line in the chapter 'Viaggio d'un verme' identifies the animal as the infernal worm of the Book of Isaiah ('*Vermis non morietur. / Il verme non morrà*'

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<sup>78</sup> The opposition between spirituality and materiality is clear in the opening lines '*Son luce ed ombra; angelica / Farfalla o verme immondo*' (OL, p. 53, ll. 1-2).

OL, p. 132, ll. 11-12). In 66.24, Isaiah delineates the mark of eternal damnation in the ‘Gehenna’ as the worm of the corpses of men that have continuously committed mortal sins, and this worm ‘shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh’.<sup>79</sup> Isaiah’s worm has been interpreted as the ‘worm of conscience’ by some of the most important scholars of Christianity, including Origen, Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, and John Calvin.<sup>80</sup> If this interpretation of ‘Lo spettro’ is correct, I would argue that the ‘bite of the worms’ ironically represents posthumous remorse for Re Orso’s sins, which finally reaches him and is used as a means of grotesque suffering not by God, who is completely absent from the fairy tale, but by the character that confesses Re Orso before his death and recites for him a Satanic litany disguised as a monk: Beelzebub. This idea of posthumous remorse, represented by the bite of the worm as ironic after-death punishment, is the key subject of Baudelaire’s poem ‘Remords posthume’. Baudelaire portrays a worm that gnaws on the corpse of his mistress like remorse, because she did not know love when she was alive (OC I, p. 35, ll. 12-13): ‘Et le ver rongera ta peau comme un remords’ (l. 14). After all, in the same year as *Re Orso* Praga wrote ‘Vendetta postuma’, which was plainly based on ‘Remords posthume’ (see Chapter II.1.4), hence we cannot rule out a probable influence on Boito’s fairy tale as well.

Also in several compositions of the *Fleurs* expressions that typically describe feeding are used alongside the graphic and macabre image of the worm that chews on cadavers, although not so much in theological as in subjective allegories, in order

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<sup>79</sup> *The Bible: Authorized King James Version*, ed. by Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 826.

<sup>80</sup> Anders Schinkel, *Conscience and Conscientious Objections* (Amsterdam: Pallas, 2007), pp. 114-115.



to enhance the strength of metaphysical concepts or the effect of continuous distressing feelings. In 'L'Irréparable' (OC I, pp. 54-55), Baudelaire describes the lyrical I's feeling of hopelessness, originating in remorse for having caused something irredeemable, in the following fashion:

Pouvons-nous étouffer le vieux, le long Remords,  
    Qui vit, s'agite et se tortille,  
Et se nourrit de nous comme le ver des morts,  
    Comme du chêne la chenille?  
Pouvons-nous étouffer l'implacable Remords?

Dans quel philtre, dans quel vin, dans quelle tisane,  
    Noierons-nous ce vieil ennemi,  
Destructeur et gourmand comme la courtisane,  
    Patient comme la fourmi?  
Dans quel philtre? – dans quel vin? – dans quelle tisane?

[...]

L'Irréparable ronge avec sa dent maudite  
    Notre âme, piteux monument,  
Et souvent il attaque, ainsi que le termite,  
    Par la base le bâtiment.  
L'Irréparable ronge avec sa dent maudite! (ll. 1-10, 36-40)

The allegorical discourse focuses on the negative and ignoble sensation of remorse, unusually caused by Satan, and not God, who has put the speaker in a desperate mood ('L'Espérance qui brille aux carreaux de l'Auberge / [...] est morte à jamais! / [...] Le Diable a tout éteint aux carreaux de l'Auberge!', ll. 26-27, 30). The poet is an 'esprit comblé d'angoisse' (l. 12), and this anguish is the punishment for the speaker's moral corruption linked to the Christian notion of the 'irrémissible' (l. 32) that condemns him to be one of the 'damnés' (l. 35). The discourse is sustained by a vocabulary that stresses this moral dissolution with realistic expressions related to animalistic gluttony and putrefaction, such as 'se nourrit', 'ver des morts', 'chenille', 'Destructeur', 'gourmand', 'ronge', 'dent maudite', and 'termite', which recall

Boito's own terminology. As we can see from this poem, as well as from the line 'Et le ver rongera ta peau comme un remords' ('Remords posthume'), 'Ronger' (to gnaw) is one of Baudelaire's favourite verbs correlated to the imagery of eating and the symbol of the worm.

'Rodere' (to gnaw) is also one of Boito's most-employed verbs associated with feeding – it appears six times in *Re Orso*, predominantly to describe the actions of the worm, yet also in a purely metaphorical sense, such as when Re Orso is deemed a wrathful 'dimon / cui rodea / Bestial ferocia' (OL, p. 113, ll. 164-165). 'Rodere' is used to subtly introduce envy (another cardinal sin), the feeling that best describes Papiol, when the latter declares the following:

Il tarlo rode il trono, – l'ostrica rode l'arca,  
L'insetto succhia il pampino – gigante e picciol gnomo  
Rosica il monte altissimo, – l'invidia strugge l'uomo –  
E divorar io posso, – Messeri, in simil guisa  
Il mio pasticcio. (OL, p. 110, ll. 50-54)

Indeed, the analogy between envy and the biting of the woodworm and of the oyster emphasises the bestiality of this sin. The reference to envy is not accidental in Papiol's speech. Papiol is a scrawny and grotesque jester who persistently deceives and mocks Re Orso, has murdered many kings and counts for his personal gain, and continuously tries to impress Re Orso and his ministers, such as in the scene of 'La cena' just mentioned, where he claims that he is able to eat an entire 'pasticcio' bigger than him, the prize gained for having (falsely) told Re Orso where the refrain came from. As a matter of fact, the description of envy in the article dedicated to 'I sette peccati mortali' could be applied to Papiol: there, 'l'*Invidia*' is portrayed as 'un buffone il quale ballonzola arcignamente e si morde il dito' (TS, p. 1279).

In the *Fleurs*, the image of the worm is often employed when portraying

human corpses and animal carcasses. In ‘Une charogne’, a carcass is vividly and realistically described in its putridness, which entails material dissolution into nature:

Les mouches bourdonnaient sur ce ventre putride,  
D’où sortaient de noirs bataillons  
De larves, qui coulaient comme un épais liquide  
Le long de ces vivants haillons. (OC I, p. 31, ll. 17-20)

The violence of death, which is depicted in the poem in its sheer bestiality excluding any transcendence or redemption,<sup>81</sup> becomes even clearer in the last two stanzas with the comparison between the carcass (probably that of an animal) and the speaker’s mistress, as well as with a terminology that associates rotting with feeding, where the ‘vermine / [...] mangera de baisers’ (OC I, p. 32, ll. 45-46) her corpse that will ‘Moisir parmi les ossements’ (l. 44). Boito certainly remembered this image when he described the putrid *charogne* of a dead cat, with a worm that feasts on it, in ‘Viaggio d’un verme’:

[...] Ecco, sul lido  
In groppa al verde carolar de’ fiotti  
Approda un gatto morto; è la *carogna*  
Un paradiso al verme. Il verme corre,  
E l’ansia cupa delle floscie anella  
Raddoppia, e l’onda del suo dorso, e sale  
Sulla *carogna*. [...]  
[...] e il bruco *rode*  
Su quel *carcame* ch’è *merenda* e barca. (OL, p. 134, ll. 81-87, 89-90, my italics)

The bizarre association of words such as ‘carogna’, ‘rode’, ‘carcame’, and ‘merenda’ underlines the baseness of the symbol of the worm, also described as a ‘caterpillar’, which in this scene takes on the role of violent agent of death and bodily decomposition through the connection between eating and decay.

Despite retaining some connections to Christian tradition, however, the worm

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<sup>81</sup> Labarthe, *Baudelaire et la tradition de l’allégorie*, p. 160.

in Baudelaire's work, whether it represents moral or physical corruption, undergoes a subjective transfiguration through the various rhetorical figures employed, and is mainly utilised to convey personal sensations or metaphysical reflections.

## **2.4 A Perversion of Religious Liturgies: Boito's and Baudelaire's Satanic Litanies**

In 'Litania' (OL, pp. 126-128), another chapter of *Re Orso*, Boito blasphemously inverts a Christian litany, more precisely the 'Litany of the Saints', by featuring Satan, demons, and *Re Orso*'s principal sins – amongst other things – in the place of Christ, God, Mary, and the angels. The litany is almost entirely in Latin: the monk invokes demons as intercession for the protagonist's soul and a toad, another personification of the Devil, continuously replies '*Orate pro eo*', that is to say 'pray for him', to every invocation. Considering the life led by *Re Orso*, who can be considered an inveterate reprobate, it is not surprising that the litany is addressed to figures of Satanic lore, more apt to a chronic sinner with no hope of salvation or redemption.

Before Boito, Baudelaire had written 'Les Litanies de Satan' (OC I, pp. 123-125), a Satanic litany based on the 'Kyrie Eleison', in which he replaces the name of the Virgin Mary with 'Satan' in the refrain 'Ô Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère!'. Baudelaire's litany, which probably also influenced the infernal '*Miserere*' of Boito's first version of the opera *Mefistofele* (TS, pp. 139-140), performed in 1868, has been the 'Texte fondateur de la "litanie inversée"'.<sup>82</sup> Its peculiar method of blasphemous inversion and its invocation of figures of Satanic lore has influenced

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<sup>82</sup> Isabelle Krzywkowski, 'La litanie: une écriture sans fin de la fin', in *Anamorphoses décadentes: l'art de la défiguration, 1880-1914*, ed. by Isabelle Krzywkowski and Sylvie Thorel-Cailleteau (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2002), p. 67.

many a Decadent work, including J.-K. Huysmans' *litanie noire* featured in the novel *Là-bas*.<sup>83</sup> Certainly, Baudelaire's 'litanies font penser à celles des messes noires', as Pichois affirmed:<sup>84</sup> Baudelaire addresses Satan as the protector of sinners and the damned, and as such the Devil – invoked in many poems of the *Fleurs* in the form of Satan, Beelzebub, demons and other infernal creatures – and not God might be able to comfort him in his sufferings. Compared to previous Romantic characterisations of the Devil, in Baudelaire's litany 'Satan is not a heroic rebel but a figure who offers minor consolations to social outcasts'.<sup>85</sup> Nonetheless, the sympathetic tone towards Satan, seen as a compassionate God, and his emblematic representation as a fallen angel ('le plus savant et le plus beau des Anges'; 'Prince de l'exil', ll. 1, 4) still retain some essential Romantic features. Furthermore, as it often happens throughout the *Fleurs*, the literary and religious symbols of Western culture are interiorised, transfigured, and charged with subjective meanings, hence implicating an intimate connection with the figure of the Devil, unlike Boito's litany which is focused on the profanity of anti-Catholic invocations, employed both to emphasise Re Orso's irredeemable damnation and as an irreverent poetic experimentation.

Baudelaire's influence on Boito's 'Litania' is evident not only in terms of the idea of a Satanic litany dedicated to the reprobate, which in the *Fleurs* concludes the section of the rebellion against God entitled 'Révolte', as 'Litania' contains a precise textual reference to 'Les Litanies de Satan'. Baudelaire praises Satan for having given man gunpowder, made of a mixture of nitre and sulphur:

Toi qui, pour consoler l'homme frêle qui souffre,

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>84</sup> 'Notices, notes et variantes', p. 1083.

<sup>85</sup> Jonathan Culler, 'Baudelaire's *Satanic Verses*', *Diacritics*, vol. 28, no. 3, *Doing French Studies* (Autumn 1998), p. 95.

Nous appris à mêler le salpêtre et le soufre. (ll. 31-32)

Similarly, in 'Litania' the monk invokes the gunpowder by uttering:

*Nitrum.*  
*Carbo.*  
*Sulphur.* (ll. 67-69)

These are the chemical elements necessary for the production of gunpowder, the same as those quoted by Baudelaire in his litany with the addition of charcoal, which the latter omitted but is in fact essential for its manufacture.

Just before stating Re Orso's principal sins, in 'Litania' three different types of illnesses are invoked, defining Re Orso's vices further: '*Delirium tremens*' (l. 73), which is related to gluttony, caused by abstinence or withdrawal from alcohol following a habitual excessive consumption; and '*Infirmetas nefanda*' as well as '*Sacra lues*' (ll. 71-72), which are connected to lust, since they are both venereal diseases. Re Orso's sexual desire and perversion have already been mentioned, and are discussed in various passages of the fairy tale almost exclusively in relation to intoxication, such as when the king is described as 'Beliàl dimon dall'ebre voglie impure' (OL, p. 113, l. 160).

## **2.5 Eroticism and Piousness: the Double Characterisation of the Woman**

'Constrictor' is a chapter completely dedicated to the depiction of Re Orso's erotic impulses, in which the king tries to convince Oliba to have sexual intercourse and he eventually summons Ligula, his serpent, to help him in her rape. The serpent, the guardian of Re Orso's harem in 'Antiche storie' (OL, p. 94, ll. 43-46), is evidently

the incarnation of Satanic erotic temptation and of the king's sexual desires; more precisely, it is another embodiment of Beelzebub, in the same manner as the worm is, since the two animals share many similarities. The association of the worm with the Devil is obvious when the priest discovers the worm 'Orribile e ner' in his pocket, and exclaims: 'È il diavolo! è il diavolo [...] quel verme!' (OL, p. 134, ll. 70-71). Both the worm and the serpent have the same mark on the face, a 'marchio qual di teschio umano' (cf. OL, p. 93, l. 38 and p. 112, l. 123) that symbolises moral and physical corruption, as well as being described as slithering, black, slimy, and swollen animals. The correlation between the two is even more obvious when analysing the journey of the worm that 'striscia' (OL, p. 134, l. 73) towards Re Orso's tomb, in which the worm is portrayed in the following fashion, by means of a very musical series of triple *senari* with internal and tail rhyme:

Sul grifo ha tre branche – e al ventre tre zanche – col viscido umor  
 Del corpo velluto – ei sparge uno *sputo* – di *rabbia e livor*.  
 Si *gonfia* e rappiglia – s'allunga e assottiglia – quel vil viator. (OL, p. 132, ll. 28-30,  
 my italics)

The terms 'spit', 'hatred', and 'swollen' were employed together by Baudelaire in order to describe the allegorical 'Serpent' (OC I, p. 58, l. 25) that represents eternal temptation, corruption, and the speaker's erotic cravings in 'À une Madone', where the serpent is 'Ce monstre tout gonflé de haine et de crachats' (l. 28). In 'Antiche storie', Boito's portrayal of Ligula the snake is similar to the description of the worm just quoted, as well as to Baudelaire's serpent in 'À une Madone': there, it is considered as a 'mostro' (OL, p. 94, l. 44) 'maligno [...] Immane e gonfio e nero, simigliante / Nel viscoso strisciar a incatramata / Gòmena' (OL, p. 93, ll. 34-37).

Baudelaire employs the image of the snake in the *Fleurs* to represent concepts

linked to a well-defined theological tradition, particularly in relation to sin and sexual desire, such as in ‘Les Métamorphoses du vampire’, one of the censured poems of the 1857 edition. ‘Les Métamorphoses du vampire’ (OC I, p. 159) is focused on the sensuality of the Satanic vampire-woman, at the same time charming and dangerous, ‘Timide et libertine, et fragile et robuste’ (l. 14), who has ‘la lèvre humide’ (l. 5) and knows ‘la science / De perdre au fond d’un lit l’antique conscience’ (ll. 5-6), and, however, is equally an horrendous ‘outré aux flancs gluants, toute pleine de pus’ (l. 20), with a malicious sexual desire. The equivalence between the speaker’s mistress, who is in the grip of erotic passion, and the twisting movements of the serpent is explicit in the *medias-res* opening of the poem:

La femme cependant, de sa bouche de fraise,  
En se tordant ainsi qu’un serpent sur la braise. (ll. 1-2)

The same image is utilised by Boito in ‘Constrictor’, who shifts the characterisation of the demonic figure from the terrible woman to the wicked monarch. Shortly before summoning the serpent, which later would bind him and Oliba together in a squeezing (and erotic) embrace, Re Orso is sexually aroused and twists like a snake:

E il Re maledetto  
S’attorce sul letto. (OL, p. 97, ll. 18-19)

The analogy between the slithering of the serpent and the movements of a human being subject to erotic desire is also featured in the *medias-res* opening of Praga’s ‘Tentazioni’, a poem from *Penombre*, where the poet depicts his erotic passion in the following manner:

Vorrei, fanciulla, esser nel tuo corsetto,  
e, come un serpe ai dì di luglio, in giri



voluttuosi errarti intorno al petto. (PP, p. 124, ll. 1-3)

The association between the images of the worm, the snake, and the serpentine movements of the female or male character seen thus far is what inspired the following passage from the first – and longest – of the three poems by Camerana entitled ‘Ad Sepultam’ (1869), which macabrely describes the (dancing-like) action of worms, ‘un orribile / Stuolo’ (CP, p. 104, ll. 177-178), over the dead body of a beautiful girl with expressions similar to Baudelaire’s ‘le Serpent qui me mord les entrailles’ (‘À une Madone’) and Boito’s aforementioned ‘ei [il verme] sparge uno sputo – di rabbia e livor’:

Ti va sul diafano  
Volto, ti morde  
A note sorde  
Il sen, le viscere  
Fatte di ciel.

[...]  
Di glauca bava  
Ti stende un vel.

Dentro la immobile  
Bocca dischiusa  
Negra e confusa  
Gira, s’avvoltola,  
Sembra danzar. (CP, pp. 104-105, ll. 182-186; 190-196)

Boito’s emphasis on the communication of sexual desires through the image of the serpent in ‘Constrictor’ has been underlined by various scholars. Sergio Martinotti affirms that *Re Orso* ‘preannuncia certa morbosa sensualità dannunziana e certo Decadentismo’,<sup>86</sup> whereas Finotti writes that ‘il desiderio che “s’attorce” esce da Re Orso e si materializza, avvolgendo e conquistando la fanciulla’, as regards the

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<sup>86</sup> ‘Il “dualismo” di Boito e del suo *Mefistofele*’, *Comunicazioni sociali*, 17, no. 4 (Oct/Dec 1995), pp. 382-383.

following scene.<sup>87</sup>

‘A me Lìgula!’ repente  
Urla il Duca, ed un serpente  
Già dall’ombra ecco sbucò;  
Sul terren le ondose anella  
Negre, viscide, lucenti,  
Già distese e si drizzò;  
Già sui piè d’Oliba bella  
Pone il grifo e già co’ denti  
L’ampio velo ne strappò...  
Già la cinghia e già la serra,  
Già l’avvince e già l’atterra  
Strascinandola sul suol!  
Roteante – strisciante  
Già depon la smorta amante  
Sovra il tepido lenzuol!  
Oh spavento! in stretto morso  
Su d’Oliba e su Re Orso  
Si ringroppa il mostro ancor,  
Già i due corpi in un serrati,  
Trucemente soffocati  
Urlan rantoli d’amor! (OL, p. 98, ll. 48-68)

In this surreal scene, Re Orso’s abstract erotic longings and the concrete figure of the serpent are one and the same thing, and his passion is rhythmically conveyed in the poem through an ingenious use of punctuation, alliteration of the consonant ‘s’, which refers to the slithering movement of the serpent (‘Strascinandola sul suol’), and the ‘guizzare improvviso delle rime all’interno del verso, l’uso della dieresi, la ripetizione [...] alternata di quel “già”’, so that ‘tutta la configurazione formale della strofa [...] materializzava foneticamente e metricamente l’immagine del serpente’.<sup>88</sup> The whole stanza expresses the undulations of the snake in many forms, including its visual silhouette by means of the irregular series of *ottonari*, while simultaneously describing a sensual (and indeed sadistic) erotic scene.

In ‘Le Serpent qui danse’, Baudelaire had already employed a specific

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<sup>87</sup> ‘Il démon dello stile’, p. 49.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

metrical scheme to outline the shape of the serpent, in order to portray the sensual dance of the poet's mistress, who undulates and moves her body like a snake. The alternation of octosyllables with feminine rhyme and pentasyllabic verses with masculine rhyme illustrates the captivating serpentine dance, and gives form and rhythm to the musicality of the scene, with a formal structure that conveys the arousal of the lyrical I and, contrastingly, the sensuality of the frigid woman, as cold as minerals:

Que j'aime voir, chère indolente,  
De ton corps si beau,  
Comme une étoffe vacillante,  
Miroiter la peau!

[...]

Comme un navire qui s'éveille  
Au vent du matin,  
Mon âme rêveuse appareille  
Pour un ciel lointain.

Tes yeux, où rien ne se révèle  
De doux ni d'amer,  
Sont deux bijoux froids où se mêle  
L'or avec le fer.

À te voir marcher en cadence,  
Belle d'abandon,  
On dirait un serpent qui danse  
Au bout d'un bâton. (OC I, pp. 29-30, ll. 1-4, 9-20)

The serpent-woman, at the same time indolent and voluptuous, excites the poet whose soul happily sets off 'Pour un ciel lointain'. The image of the spirit that flies towards a distant sky, which denotes a moral status of *in-betweenness*, or, in other words, a combination of transcendence ('âme rêveuse') and immanence ('ciel lointain'), would also be used by Boito in two of his works to underline the ecstatic act of mystical *élévation*: in 'Dualismo', where the speaker considers himself as a

‘demone che sale, / Affaticando l’ale, / Verso un lontano ciel’ (OL, p. 53, ll. 5-7); and in the ‘Prologo in cielo’ of the *Mefistofele*, in which the song and dance of the seraphim recall the poet of ‘Dualismo’, who strived to reach a far-away sky: ‘Fanciulli, teniamci [*sic*] per mano, / Fin l’ultimo cielo lontano / Noi sempre dobbiamo danzar’ (TS, p. 108).

It is safe to say that Boito associates the symbol of the snake predominantly with Re Orso’s sinful and malicious eroticism, and Baudelaire employs the same animal to depict the woman’s sensuality, which most of the time is as wicked as Re Orso’s, whilst simultaneously fascinating and tempting the poet, particularly in the cycle of the *Fleurs* generally considered to have been inspired by erotic love in the form of his mistress Jeanne Duval.<sup>89</sup> In ‘Avec ses vêtements...’ (OC I, p. 29), which precedes ‘Le Serpent qui danse’ in both the 1857 and the 1861 editions of the *Fleurs*, and is part of the aforementioned cycle, Baudelaire again describes the charming movements of the serpent-woman:

Avec ses vêtements ondoyants et nacrés,  
Même quand elle marche on croirait qu’elle danse,  
Comme ces longs serpents que les jongleurs sacrés  
Au bout de leurs bâtons agitent en cadence. (ll. 1-4)

In this poem, however, the analogy between snake and mistress, unlike ‘Le Serpent qui danse’, does not introduce a joyful and carefree atmosphere expressed by means of a musical tone. On the contrary, it serves to underline the dangers of the cold mistress. As usual in Baudelaire’s poetry, frigidity is displayed with a vocabulary stressing the analogy between the look of the woman and minerals. As in ‘Le Serpent qui danse’, her eyes are similar to rock and metal: her indifference towards

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<sup>89</sup> Namely, from ‘Parfum exotique’ to ‘Je te donne ces vers...’. See OC I, pp. 25-40.

‘l’humaine souffrance’ (l. 6) is such that in her ‘Medusa-like’<sup>90</sup> gaze ‘tout n’est qu’or, acier, lumière et diamants’ (l. 12). The comparison between minerals, light and the mistress’ eyes, as well as her double characterisation as a chaste ‘ange inviolé’ and a mysterious ‘sphinx antique’ (l. 11), serve to illustrate her ‘satanic sterility’,<sup>91</sup> together with her dualistic nature of innocent and, at the same time, sinister woman. This oxymoronic representation of the feminine subject, and her portrayal as a statue-like mistress who yet possesses a very explicit sensuality, is typical in Baudelaire’s work. In ‘Je te donne ces vers...’, the lover is deemed an ‘Être maudit’ (OC I, p. 41, l. 9) who is also an angelic and undersexed woman made of gemstone and bronze:

– Ô toi qui, comme une ombre à la trace éphémère,  
Foules d’un pied léger et d’un regard serein  
Les stupides mortels qui t’ont jugée amère,  
Statue aux yeux de jais, grand ange au front d’airain! (ll. 11-14)

This conception of the mistress as an impassive statue is taken up by Boito in ‘Constrictor’ who, in a similar fashion to Baudelaire, employs archaic literary words defining jewels and stones to depict Oliba’s frigidity, deaf to Re Orso’s sensual (and indeed sexual) calls: she is a ‘fanciulla dal sen di cammè, / Dal crin di basalte’ (OL, p. 98, ll. 38-39), who ‘non muove né voce né passo, / Par fatta di sasso’ (ll. 44-45). The expression of her face, which as in Baudelaire’s poem is described by means of the synecdoche that substitutes the noun *face* with ‘forehead’, conveys metallic light and coldness, since Re Orso asks Oliba to ‘Discopri[re] la luce freddissima e mesta / Di quella tua fronte ch’io voglio mirar’ (OL, p. 97, ll. 11-12), recalling the mistress’

<sup>90</sup> James R. Lawler, *Poetry and Moral Dialectic: Baudelaire’s ‘Secret Architecture’* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1997), p. 66.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

gaze made of ‘or, acier, lumière et diamants’ of Baudelaire’s poem ‘Avec ses vêtements...’. Furthermore, Boito inverts the metaphorical action of painfully trampling upon the lover, shifting it, once again, from the Baudelairian *femme fatale* to the evil king: if in ‘Je te donne ces vers...’ Baudelaire’s courtesan like a god ‘[Foule] d’un pied léger’ her foolish mortal lovers who have not appreciated her, in ‘Constrictor’ Re Orso tells Oliba to ‘Non far ch’io demente ti schiacci col piè!’ (OL, p. 98, l. 40).<sup>92</sup>

Depending on the poem, and occasionally in the very same poem, in the *Fleurs* the poet’s mistress can be depicted as differently as an innocent angel that might act as the speaker’s saviour, and as a demonic being who condemns him to terrible sufferings. On the one hand, the poet’s lover is deemed, among other things, a ‘Bizarre déité’ (l. 1), a cold and at the same time sexually aroused ‘Sorcière au flanc d’ébène’ (l. 4) who is a ‘Mégère libertine’ (l. 12) to whom the speaker is both attracted and repulsed, as in ‘Sed non satiata’ (OC I, p. 28); a beast having a ‘griffe’ and a ‘dent féroce’ (l. 7), with ardent ‘yeux de feu, brillants comme des fêtes’ (l. 13), as in ‘Causerie’ (OC I, p. 56). On the other hand, the salvific feminine figure of various poems of the *Fleurs*, particularly those belonging to the ‘Madame Sabatier’ cycle,<sup>93</sup> is described with various terms which stress her divine nature, such as the pious ‘Ange gardien, la Muse et la Madone’ (l. 14) of the composition ‘Que diras-tu ce soir...’ (OC I, p. 43), or the ‘Déesse, Être lucide et pur’ (l. 8) whose memory triggers ‘L’Aube spirituelle’ (OC I, p. 46) after a night of debauchery. Occasionally, this heavenly presence becomes the recipient of the poet’s genuine liturgical

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<sup>92</sup> This image is also employed by Boito in ‘Dualismo’, where he substitutes the sadistic love scene with a situation in which God ‘un dì a distrar la noia / Della sua lunga gioia / Ci schiaccierà col piè’ (OL, p. 54, ll. 40-43), again using the Baudelairian association between ennui and death, as well as the rhyme between two opposite nouns (‘noia/’gioia’).

<sup>93</sup> Namely, from ‘Semper eadem’ to ‘Le Flacon’. See OC I, pp. 41-48.

invocations, such as in ‘Réversibilité’ (‘Ange plein de gaieté, connaissez-vous l’angoisse’, OC I, p. 44, l. 1). At other times, the poet addresses her with religious-like praise that blasphemously mixes sacredness with sadism and violence, such as in ‘À une Madone’, where the mistress is worshipped as a statue-like Virgin Mary, or with sensuality, such as in the Latin poem ‘Franciscae meae laudes’, which is modelled on the ‘Dies irae’ and bears the amusing subtitle ‘Vers composés pour une modiste érudite et dévote’ (OC I, p. 940):

Esto sertis implicata,  
 Ô femina delicata  
 Per quam solvuntur peccata!

Sicut beneficium Lethe,  
 Hauriam oscula de te,  
 Quae imbuta es magnete.

[...]

Meos circa lumbos mica,  
 O castitatis lorica,  
 Aqua tincta seraphica;

Patera gemmis corusca,  
 Panis salsus, mollis esca,  
 Divinum vinum, Francisca! (OC I, p. 61-62, ll. 4-9, 28-33)

[Be into a garland woven, / O my captivating woman / Through whom sins are all absolved! / As I would obliging Lethe, / Let me freely sip your kisses, / So magnetically imbued. / [...] / Gleam around my loins and guard them / O thou corselet of virtue / Made of water angel-dyed; / Drinking bowl that gleams with gemstones, / Salted bread and tender morsel, / My Francisca, heaven’s wine!]<sup>94</sup>

Religiosity and promiscuity, sexual and chaste acts are here juxtaposed in order to playfully experiment with the religious and mystical language of the Latin decadence, which according to Baudelaire ‘est singulièrement propre à exprimer la passion telle que l’a comprise et sentie le monde poétique moderne’ (OC I, p. 940).

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<sup>94</sup> ‘Praises for My Francisca’, in *The Flowers of Evil*, trans. by James McGowan, pp. 125, 127.

Pious candour and lasciviousness are combined particularly in the six erotic poems condemned in 1857, such as in the following lines taken from ‘Les Bijoux’, which associate animality with purity:

Les yeux fixés sur moi, comme un tigre dompté,  
D’un air vague et rêveur elle essayait des poses,  
Et la candeur unie à la lubricité  
Donnait un charme neuf à ses métamorphoses. (OC I, p. 158, ll. 13-16)

This dualistic representation of the mistress is also very much present in *Re Orso*. Even though at first glance Oliba appears to be the stereotypical damsel in distress, upon a thorough analysis this interpretation does not seem acceptable any more. Boito’s ability to deceive the reader has already been noted, and as Spera affirmed, ‘non piccolo è il rischio di farsi avviluppare in una rete ingannevole tesa dall’autore, che simula e dissumula, spargendo una serie di più o meno appariscenti depistaggi al lettore’.<sup>95</sup> Oliba certainly seems innocent and at the mercy of *Re Orso*’s depraved behaviour, but in Boito’s *Crete*, the ‘maledetta / Per l’amor di Pasife isola infame’, no character is free from sin and corruption. Oliba’s double nature is depicted from the very beginning, in the scene from ‘Antiche storie’ where the king writes ‘un famigliar messaggio’ (OL, p. 94, l. 61) to the *doge* of Venice in order to ask for a new bride:

Ove chiedea la più formosa donna  
Delle lagune e la più casta. Il Doge  
Trovò la Dea da un usurier sul lido  
Della Giudecca, che vendea per oro  
Le figlie sue [...]. (ll. 62-66)

The first thing to notice is the vocabulary that evokes sensuality (‘la più formosa

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<sup>95</sup> ‘Le sperimentazioni poetiche di Boito’, p. 8.



donna’) as well as virginity (‘la più casta’), employed to portray the paradoxical request for a woman that must be both the most voluptuous and the most chaste. The contradiction continues with the juxtaposition of the definition of Oliba as a heavenly goddess with the fact that, rather antiphrastically, she has been sold to Re Orso as a slave by a usurer who sells his daughters for gold. This opposite representation is elaborated further in ‘Constrictor’, where Re Orso tries to convince an indifferent Oliba to have sexual intercourse, and declaims an ode dedicated to her in which she is portrayed in a contradictory fashion. At first, the mistress epitomises the beautiful yet devilish *femme fatale*:

‘Oliba! sirena dell’adrie lagune,  
 Oliba! vezzosa conchiglia di mar!  
 Disciogli le chiome foltissime e brune,  
 Medusa fatale dal fosco raggjar.  
 L’oscuro zendado ti toglia da testa,  
 Discopri la luce freddissima e mesta  
 Di quella tua fronte ch’io voglio mirar.  
 Disfama le ardenti pupille digiune. (OL, p. 97, ll. 6-13)

Re Orso compares Oliba to well-known symbols of dangerous women such as sirens and the lethal Medusa, who could bewitch men and turn them into stone by means of her gaze, which is here described with an oxymoron that unites feelings of attraction and repulsion, darkness (‘fosco’) and light (‘raggiar’). Medusa’s gaze is reprised in the next lines, where Re Orso asks her mistress to remove her veil and show her facial expression, which is believed to convey an enchanting and very cold light that recalls Medusa’s stone gaze. Nonetheless, the oxymoronic juxtaposition between the ‘luce freddissima’ of her look and the desiring ‘ardenti pupille digiune’ of her eyes that must be *fed* with the sexual act (with yet another reference to food), reveals the typical Baudelairian combination of woman’s indifference and sexual desire, of

external frigidity and internal passion, with a clear reference to the ‘prunelles ardentes’ of the prophetic tribe who has ‘fiers appétits’ of Baudelaire’s ‘Bohémiens en voyage’ (OC I, p. 18, ll. 1-3).<sup>96</sup>

Oliba, however, remains still like a stone and Re Orso decides to change the tone of his persuasion, which, if in the first instance seems to be very different compared to the aforementioned stanza, is in fact similarly composed of opposite depictions, in this case related to chastity and eroticism:

‘Oliba! per l’aure del lido natale,  
Oliba! pei canti del tuo gondolier!  
T’appressa alla coltre del letto regale,  
Mia vergine muta dai bianchi pensier.  
L’amore dell’uomo, fanciulla, è più bello  
Che quel del liòne, che quel del torello,  
Che quel dell’ardente puledro leggier. (OL, p. 97, ll. 20-26)

Utterly inverting the characterisation of the female subject, now Re Orso appeals to the sweet love songs of the Venetian gondolier, and describes Oliba as a pious virgin with innocent thoughts. This portrayal of the mistress does not last long: once more, the subsequent verses introduce an erotic element that clashes starkly with the image of Oliba as just described. Re Orso tells Oliba that the love that comes from men is ‘more beautiful’ than that of the lion, the bull and the ‘ardente puledro leggier’, thereby implicating bestiality and suggesting that Oliba already knows animalistic love, with the adjective ‘ardente’ that recalls her ‘ardenti pupille digiune’ of the previous stanza. Moreover, the reference to the animals, particularly the bull, evokes both the lust of Pasiphae who gave birth to the Minotaur, half man and half bull, as

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<sup>96</sup> For the simultaneous feelings of attraction and repulsion towards a dangerous mistress who has a blinding Medusa-like gaze, see also Boito’s ‘Madrigale’, which is focused on the combination of light/love and darkness/poison (OL, p. 65), as well as the stanza of ‘Dualismo’ dedicated to the hypnotic ‘incanto reo’ of the modern Circes (OL, p. 55, ll. 85-91).

described in ‘Antiche storie’ with the expression ‘amor di Pasife’, and Re Orso’s erotic menagerie of the same section. Oliba’s eroticism as represented in *Re Orso* is consistent with the origin of her name, which is taken from the Book of Ezekiel, where ‘Ooliba’ is a lustful courtesan cursed by God.<sup>97</sup> Boito also associates Oliba with the biblical Eve in ‘La cena’, when during the feast Oliba gives Re Orso an apple ‘muta e col gesto d’Eva’ (OL, p. 112, l. 118), with the ‘swollen’ worm hidden in it:

(E colla destra inerme  
[Re Orso] Spacca quel frutto... orrore!... – orrore! orrore! un verme!!  
Un verme irsuto e gonfio – gli cadde sulla mano! (ll. 120-122)

In this scene, Boito again makes a rather straightforward connection between the worm and the Satanic serpent of Eden that tempted Eve, even though the substitution of the serpent with the worm, and the association worm-apple, stresses even more the idea of corruption (material and moral) and gluttony that lies behind the original Fall. The narrator depicts Oliba as the woman that gave Adam the apple – the primordial symbol of temptation – and, as such, the veritable source of Re Orso’s sins. After all, as Boito wrote in the ‘Riviste drammatiche’ of the *Politecnico* while reviewing Émile Augier’s *La Contagion*, ‘Per Adamo il castigo fu una mela’ (TS, p. 1192). According to Boito, when the woman commits a sin, it is an eviler one: ‘Quando il peccato s’incarna in Eva è più maligno che quando s’incarna in Adamo: lady Macbeth è peggiore di Macbeth’ (TS, p. 1194).

This depiction of Oliba as a depraved woman stands opposite to her representation as an angelic woman made by the Provençal minstrel in the chapter ‘Ago e arpa’, who dedicates her a love song dotted with religious vocabulary:

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<sup>97</sup> Villa, ‘Introduzioni e note’, p. 446.

Tu m'apparisti, angelicata donna,  
Tutta piena di grazia e di virtù.  
Certo sali la prece alla Madonna  
Ed a Gesù. (OL, p. 105, ll. 25-28)

The definition of the slave-courtesan Oliba as 'angelicata donna', hence using an expression typical of the Stilnovistic tradition, is certainly not devoid of an ironic and polemical tone against the Stilnovistic and Petrarchan themes still employed by Romanticism.<sup>98</sup> However, it has to be taken into account that Boito might have described Oliba as such because he genuinely wanted to represent the duality of woman, part angelic and part sinful being, as he had already done with the duality of man in 'Dualismo'. The characterisation of woman as a divine creature was not a prerogative of the *Dolce Stil Novo* at the end of the thirteenth century, or of the sentimental poetry of the Italian Romantics in the first half of the nineteenth century. As seen above, Baudelaire also utilised the image of the angelic woman, and in 'Réversibilité' he had called his mistress an 'Ange plein de bonheur, de joie et de lumières' to whom he 'n'implore [...] que [s]es prières' (OC I, p. 45, ll. 21, 24), a line which Boito might have recalled when defining Oliba as an 'angelicata donna / Tutta piena di grazia e di virtù'.

In an analogous fashion, in *Tavolozza* and *Penombre* Praga draws from Baudelaire's *Fleurs* not only the notion of the voluptuous woman, but her dualistic condition in general, with a vocabulary that combines sacredness and licentiousness, as we shall see more thoroughly in the chapter of this study dedicated to Praga. In the third of the four poems that bear the title 'Dama elegante', for example, Praga describes the elegant mistress as a 'donna piena di gioie e di luci' (PP, p. 145, l. 17)

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<sup>98</sup> See Villa, 'Introduzioni e note', p. 448.

(which recalls the ‘Ange plein de bonheur, de joie et de lumières’ from ‘Réversibilité’), with an eye ‘d’angelo e di sfinge’ (l. 29) (hence very similar to the ‘ange inviolé’ and the ‘sphinx antique’ of the poem ‘Avec ses vêtements...’) and a ‘mistico labbro’ (PP, p. 146, l. 47). In the first ‘Dama elegante’, the mistress becomes ‘l’angelo, il santo e la madonna’ (PP, p. 143, l. 38), and Praga here quotes almost literally the ‘Ange gardien, la Muse et la Madone’ of Baudelaire’s ‘Que diras-tu ce soir...’. This topic would be similarly treated by Camerana, who would use precise references to Baudelaire’s *Fleurs* (see Chapter III.4).

This double characterisation of the feminine subject and the juxtaposition of erotic and religious elements are a constant feature of Boito’s work, including his operas, most notably *Mefistofele* in which of the two female characters loved by Faust, Margherita and Helen of Troy, ‘Margherita è l’innocenza, quasi l’ignoranza cristiana. Elena è la sensualità pagana [...] Voluttuosa come una Dea’.<sup>99</sup> In the final act of the *Mefistofele*, this dualistic definition of the woman, as well as of life and reality in general, returns, when a moribund Faust exclaims: ‘Tutto conobbi: il Real, l’Ideale, / L’Amore della vergine e l’Amore / della Dea’ (TS, p. 177).

In *Re Orso*, Oliba is not the sole female character portrayed with opposite features: although the king’s first wife Mirra is described as a ‘söave amor’ (see Chapter I.2.2), the name ‘Mirra’ refers to the ancient Greek myth of Myrrha, taken up among others by Ovid in the erotic elegy ‘Myrrha’ of the tenth book of the *Metamorphoses*, in which Myrrha is an incestuous woman who loved her father and gave birth to Adonis.<sup>100</sup> Of course, both the names ‘Mirra’ and ‘Oliba’ might also

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<sup>99</sup> Giulio Ricordi, *Disposizione scenica per l’opera ‘Mefistofele’ di Arrigo Boito compilata e regolata secondo le istruzioni dell’autore* (Milan: Ricordi, 1877), p. 3, repr. in William Ashbrook and Gerardo Guccini, *‘Mefistofele’ di Arrigo Boito* (Milan: Ricordi, 1998), p. 39.

<sup>100</sup> *Metamorphoses*, trans. by A.D. Melville (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 234-241.

derive from ‘À une Madone’, where Baudelaire sacrilegiously combines the image of the incense used to worship the Virgin Mary and the poet’s erotic cravings: ‘Tout se fera [...] *Oliban, Myrrhe, / Et sans cesse vers toi [...] En Vapeurs montera mon Esprit orageux*’ (OC I, p. 59, ll. 34-36, my italics). In his poetry and novellas, Boito focuses particularly on the irreverent and provocative characteristics of the relationship between sensuality and purity, or, in other words, between eroticism and sacredness. Apart from *Re Orso*, two of the most inspired moments related to this subject in Boito’s work are certainly Israhel van Meckenen’s engravings, featuring in the poem ‘Georg Pfecher’, depicting the Virgin Mary that blasphemously spellbind and tempt to carnal sin the immoral monk (OL, p. 72, ll. 75-80); and the combination of incest, religiosity, and sensuality that defines the toxic atmosphere of the novella ‘Iberia’, in which ambiguous phrases such as ‘baciavansi col bacio religioso e casto che si dà agli amuleti’ (OL, p. 193) come close to the Baudelairian combination of mysticism and carnality of lines such as ‘Je t’adore [...] Avec la dévotion / Du prêtre pour son idole’ (‘Chanson d’après-midi’, OC I, p. 59, ll. 5, 7-8). Boito’s willingness to depict a dualistic reality without moral prejudice, as also seen in Chapter I.1.4 in the discussion of ‘Lezione d’anatomia’ where the ‘Fanciulla pia, / Dolce, purissima’ was in fact neither pious nor virgin, is combined to a firm disposition to debunk the Romantic conception of the woman as solely angelic, which does not take into account her genuine (and sometimes overwhelming) dark side. In *Re Orso*, Oliba is another one of the ‘fanciulle-fiore della produzione boitiana’ that in fact are sinful and depraved characters,<sup>101</sup> who together with the other ‘apostolesse del male’, such as Mirra, has ‘movenze modestissime e tranquille, tanto che a vederle si direbbero

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<sup>101</sup> Villa, ‘Introduzioni e note’, p. 426.

donne ammodo e virtuose', but they are actually the 'incarnazione femminile del vizio e della malvagità' ('Riviste drammatiche', TS, pp. 1193-1194).

In spite of the Baudelairian treatment of feminine and erotic subjects that certainly had a well-defined influence on *Re Orso*, Boito did not reach the depths of language and themes considered in the *Fleurs du Mal*, such as the sacrilegious notion of 'chair spirituelle' that has 'le parfum des Anges', as explained in 'Que diras-tu ce soir...' (OC I, p. 43, l. 7). Boito's choice of a very operatic – and libretto-like – fairy tale in third-person narration, the objective of which was to demystify conventional ideas in a provocative and experimental manner, precluded him the possibility to fully depict sensations linked to the various types of relationships, and indeed to use a religious vocabulary to express those sensations. Notwithstanding the use of the oxymoron, in *Re Orso* there is little place for the scrutiny of terrible and consuming loves that simultaneously attract and repel, involving adoration as well as feelings of hostility and hatred that occasionally turn to sadism, such as in Baudelaire's 'Je t'adore à l'égal...' (see OC I, p. 27) and 'À une Madone'. This type of sentimental experience would be thoroughly treated only at a later stage of Boito's work, namely in his last opera *Nerone*, the libretto of which would be published for the first time in 1901 as a freestanding book, where the violent relationship between Nerone and Asteria is dotted with Baudelairian expressions such as Asteria's 'È il mio nume e lo adoro! [...] Egli è l'Angelo crudel', 'L'orror m'attira / Come un amante' (TS, pp. 196-197); or Nerone's 'Sul volto ho il tuo pallor, son la tua preda, / Estreme infliggi angosce a me! [...] mio pallid'incubo, [...] Dammi il morso! Estatico l'attendo / E t'offro il labro!!' (TS, p. 240). *Re Orso*'s relationship with Oliba can thus be considered as an important experiment with Baudelairian material in

preparation for his grandest – yet instrumentally uncompleted – opera, *Nerone*.

In *Re Orso*, death also has a prominent place, but the grotesque and occasionally comic treatment of the scenes involving the killings, which feature either hyperbolic or nonsensical elements, serves to create a dreamlike and bizarre atmosphere, and to ‘strutturare il fiabesco e l’orrido, a dare una fisionomia più lieve alla stessa simbologia che domina – e talora pesantemente – la fiaba’.<sup>102</sup> Murders and violence, grotesquely depicted, are always connected to *Re Orso*’s deadly sins (particularly gluttony, lust, and wrath) as well as to the frightening refrain, and they are used primarily as aesthetic tools to picturesquely portray a rotten world in which the worm and the serpent allegorically represent moral and physical corruption, which upon a thorough analysis appear as the pivotal themes of the fairy tale. In a rather Baudelairian manner, in the literary article ‘Riviste drammatiche’ Boito himself declared the need to use artificial artistic devices in order to treat and idealise the deplorable features of certain characters, and the hyperbolic, comic, grotesque, macabre, fantastic, and ultimately allegorical elements of *Re Orso* are all part of this aesthetic idealisation: ‘Quando la crudeltà o la viltà del carattere non è, per così dire, idealizzata da qualche lato artistico o pittoresco, quello non è carattere degno della scena’ (TS, p. 1198). This allegorical poetics of excess aimed at representing a depraved character such as *Re Orso* finds its specific precursor in Baudelaire, although the use of the fairy tale set in the distant Middle Ages as literary genre, and the preferred choice of abstract allegories still linked to a theological tradition, entail a complete detachment from the subject matter, both on an emotional and a sympathetic level. Unlike Baudelaire in ‘Au lecteur’, Boito’s purpose was not to

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<sup>102</sup> Mariani, p. 351.



declare the similarity between the hypocrisy of the poet and that of the reader when dealing with foul topics such as vice and ennui ('Hypocrite lecteur, – mon semblable, – mon frère!'); it is rather to be able to treat those very same topics without any moral or religious prejudice. Ultimately, Boito takes a modern and anti-Romantic approach in his depiction of debauchery, scenes of sexual nature, sadism, and the other facets of sin and excess, discarding any possible idealistic salvation or redemption for the poetic subject and also involving a sense of paranoia and monomania in the form of the recurring refrain.

As Benjamin has eloquently stated, 'Baroque allegory sees the corpse only from outside. Baudelaire sees it also from within'.<sup>103</sup> This capacity to employ the full extent of the allegory is the reason why it is possible to see Baudelaire as 'le dernier grand poète allégorique', particularly because he managed to create work that 'fa[it] de l'allégorie l'armature centrale d'une poétique nouvelle'.<sup>104</sup> This 'poétique nouvelle' involves a transfiguration of contemporary reality into poetic beauty; the real becomes the material to allegorise, as Baudelaire claims in 'Le Cygne':

Paris change! mais rien dans ma mélancolie  
N'a bougé! palais neufs, échafaudages, blocs,  
Vieux faubourgs, tout pour moi devient allégorie  
Et mes chers souvenirs sont plus lourds que des rocs. (OC I, p. 86, ll. 29-32)

Together with the oxymoron and the analogy, the allegory plays an essential role in Baudelaire's poetry, which has been described as a continuous 'oscillation entre intériorisation et détachement',<sup>105</sup> that is to say between subjectivity and objectivity. If this 'oscillation' between two poles of poetic representation has only partially

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<sup>103</sup> 'Central Park', p. 163.

<sup>104</sup> Labarthe, *Baudelaire et la tradition de l'allégorie*, p. 616.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

influenced *Re Orso*, and, more generally, the entirety of Boito's poetic work, it left a more defined mark on Praga's and Camerana's respective poetic experimentations with Baudelairian material. Alongside what has been commonly conceived as the most evident aspect of Baudelaire's influence on Praga, that is to say the aesthetic, explicit, and ultimately shocking Baudelairism centred upon the notion of 'maledettismo scapigliato', Praga employs various rhetorical figures in his attempts to subject outside reality to poetic interiorisation, in particular through the use of synaesthesia and analogy. In *Tavolozza* and, more significantly, *Penombre*, the synaesthetic figure of speech is employed in order to bring together elements – especially natural elements – that refer to different sensorial categories, thereby expressing the poet's inner sensations and impressions, as we shall see in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER II

### Emilio Praga, Reader of the *Fleurs du Mal*: For a Redefinition of Praga's Baudelairism

#### 1. *Approaching the Model: on the Development of Praga's Baudelairism*

##### 1.1 Baudelairian Beginnings: 1850s Paris and the *Schizzi a penna*

The writer and painter Emilio Praga, best known to his contemporaries for his verse collection *Penombre*, has been described, amongst other things, as the ‘inventore della poesia scapigliata’,<sup>1</sup> and rightly so. Praga's first collection of poetry, *Tavolozza*, was published in 1862, and includes poems written during his youthful travels around Europe between 1857 and 1859. Praga wrote the location and date of composition of some poems in *Tavolozza*. Alongside Switzerland and the Netherlands, he visited France: in May 1858 he was in Avignon, where he probably completed the poem ‘Un frate’ (PP, p. 25); in August of the same year, he stopped in Normandy (‘All’osteria’, PP, p. 21), before heading to Dunkirk in the French Flanders and afterwards to the Netherlands. Praga also stayed in Paris, probably towards the end of 1858 and (or) at the beginning of 1859. In the second ‘Impressioni di viaggio’ of his *Schizzi a penna* (1865), a collection of very short experimental writings in prose that depict scenes from those journeys, Praga claims that while he was in Switzerland on his way back to Italy – most likely in the first months of 1859 – he found himself thinking about the French capital, ‘lasciata pochi dì prima’ (SP, p. 78). It is not known precisely when he stayed in Paris; in April 1859,

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<sup>1</sup> Francesco Spera, ‘La letteratura del disagio: Scapigliatura e dintorni’, in *Storia della civiltà letteraria Italiana*, 5 vols, ed. by Giorgio Bàrberi Squarotti (Turin: Utet, 1994), vol. V, tome I, 150.

however, he was back in Lombardy, where he completed the poem ‘La morta del villaggio’ (PP, p. 23).

The importance of Praga’s visit to Paris lies in the crucial discovery of the literary works that helped him shape his poetic style on multiple levels: formal, theoretical, and thematic. Scholars who approached the topic have spoken particularly of Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du Mal* as Praga’s pivotal encounter; the role of this discovery on the subsequent development of Praga’s poetics has never been underestimated, insofar as *Penombre* (1864), Praga’s second collection and, together with Boito’s *Re Orso*, the best representative of Scapigliatura’s poetry, has been defined by Mario Petrucciani, one of the most attentive scholars of Praga’s work, as ‘forse uno dei [volumi] più baudelairiani della letteratura italiana moderna’.<sup>2</sup> However, scholars have different opinions regarding the year of Praga’s sojourn in Paris. Nardi affirms that Praga ‘nel ’58, a Parigi, dovette subire [...] il fascino della poesia di Baudelaire’;<sup>3</sup> similarly, Pietro Gibellini claims that in 1858 in Paris, Praga ‘vi fa un incontro decisivo, per lui e per la cultura italiana: *Les fleurs du mal* di Charles Baudelaire’.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, according to Giulio Carnazzi ‘Praga aveva conosciuto *Les Fleurs* fin dal 1859, in occasione di un suo prolungato soggiorno parigino’;<sup>5</sup> and Farinelli takes up this suggestion by asserting that Praga was in Paris in 1859, where ‘si accalorò all’unicità della lezione di Baudelaire’.<sup>6</sup>

While Praga’s encounter with Baudelaire’s poetry in Paris in either 1858 or 1859 has been taken for granted, there is actually no clear proof or testimony that

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<sup>2</sup> *Emilio Praga* (Turin: Einaudi, 1962), p. 72.

<sup>3</sup> *Scapigliatura*, p. 93.

<sup>4</sup> ‘La voce di Baudelaire, la libreria di Praga’, in *Indagini otto-novecentesche* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1983), p. 47.

<sup>5</sup> “‘Les Fleurs du mal’ e la poesia di Emilio Praga: un primo capitolo nella storia della fortuna italiana di Baudelaire”, in *Baudelaire, poeta e critico* (Bologna: Pàtron, 1981), pp. 27-28.

<sup>6</sup> *La Scapigliatura*, p. 123.

corroborates this supposition. The only statement that would link Praga's visit to Paris and the *Fleurs*, frequently quoted when discussing Praga's discovery of Baudelaire, would be in the following autobiographical passage from chapter XX of the novel *Memorie del presbiterio*, completed in 1881 by his friend Roberto Sacchetti after Praga's death:<sup>7</sup>

Io ho cominciato di buon'ora a girellar per il mondo a mio talento: [...] avevo dimorato a Parigi; e conosciuto colà quella generazione, per cui Victor Hugo ha scritto *Les Misérables*, un'epopea, e Baudelaire *Les fleurs du mal*, un'imprecazione, cesellata nel diamante – avida delle alte cose che le sfuggono, sdegnosa delle basse che l'assaltano, generazione crucciosa che prova il rimorso prima del peccato, per cui il piacere è un cilicio che gli dilania il petto. (MP, pp. 121-122)

With critical acumen, the narrator here describes the peculiar oxymoronic features of Baudelaire's poetry that transmute hideous reality (the 'imprecazione') into poetic beauty ('cesellata nel diamante'). Noteworthy is the fact the narrator speaks only of meeting the Parisian 'generation' that, according to him, is represented in the *Fleurs*, and not about the *Fleurs* itself. Furthermore, as Giuseppe Zaccaria has demonstrated in his essay on the composition of the *Memorie*, this very passage was most likely written in its entirety by Sacchetti, and not by Praga.<sup>8</sup> The only association between Praga's stay in Paris and the *Fleurs* is hence put into question.

Without knowing exactly when and where Praga encountered Baudelaire's poetry, it is necessary to analyse the explicit references to the *Fleurs*, as well as other Baudelairian echoes, in the poems that constitute *Tavolozza* and prose writings belonging to the same period. The first piece of evidence can be found in the second 'Impressioni di viaggio' of the *Schizzi a penna*. While thinking about 'Parigi, [la]

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<sup>7</sup> See for instance Nardi, *Scapigliatura*, pp. 110-111: 'Non è credibile che [nel 1858 a Parigi Praga] non sentisse parlare delle *Fleurs du mal* [...]. C'è una confessione, nelle *Memorie del presbiterio*, che prova e non prova'.

<sup>8</sup> 'La composizione delle "Memorie del presbiterio"', *Lettere Italiane*, 26, no. 4 (Oct/Dec 1981), p. 468.

gaia Parigi, lasciata pochi di prima', Praga suddenly recalls the 'mille bellezze brulicanti sulle rive della Senna, la Frini dagli occhi di fuoco e dai seni di marmo, le cacciatrici di giovinetti, i sepolcreti dell'ideale', who gave him 'baci rodenti' (SP, p. 78). As Ermanno Paccagnini affirms, the "baci rodenti" preannunciano un baudelairiano clima da *Penombre*.<sup>9</sup> These 'gnawing kisses', which oxymoronically combine pleasure and suffering and convey the voracious erotic appetite of the prostitutes in Paris, defined as 'Frini', indeed recall the atmosphere of Baudelaire's most licentious poems; moreover, Baudelaire himself references the sensual 'Phrynés' in the first of the six erotic compositions of the 1857 edition of the *Fleurs* condemned by the tribunal, that is to say 'Lesbos' (OC I, p. 150, ll. 11, 15). However, it is the whole description of the Parisian prostitutes that suggests Praga at this stage was already assimilating Baudelaire's lesson: the characterisation of the beautiful yet dangerous courtesans ('bellezze', 'cacciatrici') with 'eyes of fire' and parts of the body made of rock, mineral, or wood (in this case 'seni di marmo'), hence similar to a statue; the association of their behaviour with that of animals ('brulicanti', 'cacciatrici'); and the link between brothel and graveyard ('sepolcreti'). These are all peculiar features of Baudelaire's poetics that play a fundamental role in Praga's poetry, particularly (but not limited to) *Penombre*. Compare, for instance, the passage just quoted with the 'yeux de feu' of the feminine subject in 'Causerie' (OC I, p. 56, l. 13),<sup>10</sup> where the speaker's previous mistresses are generally conceived as 'bêtes' (l. 14) with a 'griffe' and 'dent féroce' (l. 7); or with the portrayal of the insatiable yet statue-like courtesan in 'Sed non satiata' (OC I, p. 28), which would influence many a poem of *Penombre* and depicts the 'Sorcière au flanc d'ébène' (l. 4)

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<sup>9</sup> 'Introduzione', in SP, p. 34.

<sup>10</sup> The image of the courtesan with 'eyes of fire' reappears in one of the most Baudelairian poems of *Penombre*, 'Profanazioni', where Lisa is 'una pallida dall'occhio di foco' (PP, p. 185, l. 35).

and ‘Mégère libertine’ (l. 12) to whom the lyrical I says: ‘Par ces deux grands yeux noirs, [...] verse-moi moins de flamme’ (ll. 9-10).

As Praga reveals in the letter addressed to Antonio Ghislanzoni that serves as preface to the *Schizzi a penna*, the writings included in this collection were composed during his travels around Europe, probably in the second half of 1858 and at the beginning of 1859, although they were only published in 1865 in the journal *Rivista minima*. In this missive, Praga claims that the *Schizzi* were written on ‘quattro foglietti’ belonging to a ‘certo libricciolo che mi fu compagno fedele di viaggio’, which was bought in the French Flanders, and they represented ‘Impressioni genuine di paesi, d’uomini e di casi’ (SP, pp. 61, 66). This statement, which confirms that the *Schizzi* were ideated and completed during those journeys, has been considered as genuine;<sup>11</sup> Praga, however, could have added or expunged or modified some sections before their publication in 1865, including the Baudelairean passage here examined.

## **1.2 Tavolozza: Idyllic Realism and Feeble Baudelairean Echoes?**

More precise references to Baudelaire’s work are to be found in Praga’s first collection of poetry, *Tavolozza*. Particularly in his youthful years, Praga divided his time between poetry and painting, to which the title *Tavolozza* is a direct reference. Painting is often treated as a meta-artistic subject in Praga’s poems and had a clear influence on his poetic techniques. It is not a coincidence that some poems of *Tavolozza* share motifs with paintings he completed during those years: marine and countryside landscapes, and scenes of contemporary life of the working class, such as fishermen and sailors, depicted with an impressionistic touch characterised by a

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<sup>11</sup> See Paccagnini, p. 41.



distinctive attention to detail.<sup>12</sup> In *Tavolozza* Praga poetically translates, and at the same time expands, his taste for the pictorial *bozzetto* by using scenes from seaside villages and other subjects taken from everyday life, such as the elderly standing outside hospices ('Vecchierelli al sole', PP, pp. 58-59); a funeral of a poor and ugly girl in a village ('La morta del villaggio', PP, p. 23); or the city streets with their wealthy inhabitants and lower class workers ('Il corso all'alba', PP, pp. 10-14). Many of these pictorial scenes act as setting for a brief story related to the characters' feelings and beliefs, stylistically depicted with prosaic language and dialogical structures that express Praga's moral predisposition towards the poor and the underprivileged, whose simple, honest, and hard-working life is occasionally compared to that of the rich bourgeoisie dedicated to worship at the altar of the 'dio metallo' ('Per cominciare', PP, p. 8, l. 44), or to laziness ('Il corso all'alba', PP, p. 11, ll. 15-16) and deceit ('I superstiti', PP, pp. 59-61).

These characteristics of Praga's poetics were first believed to be his only peculiar and original features, which could best describe and ultimately define not only *Tavolozza* but also 'Meriggi', the first section of *Penombre*, the tone and motifs of which are similar to most compositions of *Tavolozza*. This is essentially the view shared by Giosuè Carducci and Benedetto Croce which became, for early twentieth-century scholars, the customary critical interpretation of Praga's work. According to Carducci, the veritable 'originalità del Praga' was precisely the peaceful and rural elements present in the poems of *Tavolozza* and 'Meriggi', such as 'quel trillo di lodola, [...] quella immediata e lieta e sincera percezione della natura [...] che si

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<sup>12</sup> See Nardi, *Scapigliatura*, pp. 89-101, who has comprehensively discussed the relations between *Tavolozza* and Praga's paintings of the period 1857-62.

sente, si vede, e si ammira in alcune sue prime e più ingenuie poesie'.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Croce describes Praga as a poet with a 'bontà di debole e di malato', as the *cantore* of idyllic landscapes and of the underdogs 'che sono un po' come te: poveri e deboli e malati, dagli affetti miti e dalle ispirazioni idilliache'.<sup>14</sup> Both Carducci and Croce abstained from discussing anything but these features of Praga's poetry. As a matter of fact, Carducci vehemently dismissed the poems of the other two sections of *Penombre*, 'Vespri' and 'Mezzenotti', with their anticlericalism, intoxication, eroticism, violence, worms, and corpses, that is to say what would be later defined as 'maledettismo' or 'realismo scapigliato', as simply an imitation of other European writers. More precisely, Carducci asked: 'Avete letto Vittore Hugo, il Heine, il Baudelaire? Ma quello che voi nelle poesie del Praga proclamate di più era già nell'Hugo, nel Heine, nel Baudelaire'.<sup>15</sup> This conception entailed a separation between two very different identities of Praga's poetry: an idyllic and 'rural' one, featured in *Tavolozza* and 'Meriggi', and a rebellious, blasphemous one, comprising the rest of Praga's work, most particularly 'Vespri' and 'Mezzenotti'.

More recent scholarship, starting with Petrucciani's 1962 study on Praga, has rejected this limited conception, re-evaluating Praga's entire work and highlighting the elements of 'maledettismo' that already characterised *Tavolozza* and the *Schizzi a penna* previously mentioned. As Petrucciani writes, 'la tematica di *Tavolozza* non s'identifica tutta [...] con l'idillio, ma [...] già rasenta (e talora varca, per penetrarvi con massicce infiltrazioni) i confini del maledettismo scapigliato'.<sup>16</sup> As shall be explained more thoroughly in Chapter II.2.1, Praga's 'maledettismo scapigliato' has

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<sup>13</sup> 'Dieci anni a dietro', pp. 251-252.

<sup>14</sup> *La letteratura della nuova Italia*, p. 237.

<sup>15</sup> 'Dieci anni a dietro', p. 251.

<sup>16</sup> *Emilio Praga*, p. 55.

been widely considered as deriving most notably from Baudelaire's *Fleurs*, and at the same time as the most profound influence that the French poet has had on Praga. The latter's interpretation of Baudelaire, Petrucciani continues, 'è condotta preminentemente dall'angolatura *maudite*, è interessata cioè, con netta preferenza, a quanto nel testo appariva [...] più solleticante, stralunato, controcorrente'.<sup>17</sup> According to Petrucciani, Praga's Baudelairism consisted in a gradual incorporation of innovative and scandalous themes in order to shake up the rather conservative and moralistic Italian literature. This incorporation should be considered as gradual since although it is evident that blasphemous and rebellious elements are already featured in *Tavolozza*, these are only to be found sparsely, alongside (and occasionally within) the depiction of marine, rural, and working-class scenes.<sup>18</sup> Petrucciani further notes that the dissonant and irreverent note of *Tavolozza*, which is still moderate and rather clumsy, owes more to Heine than to Baudelaire, as even though 'Praga conosceva *Les fleurs du mal* dal 1858', his first collection 'non reca che pallidi riecheggiamenti dell'opera del grande francese'.<sup>19</sup> Analogously, Carnazzi has reiterated the common idea that 'In *Tavolozza* l'influsso delle *Fleurs* è molto circoscritto, limitato a pochi tratti di un'imitazione alquanto esteriore', which must be ascribed to 'una sensibilità genericamente intonata a suggestioni baudelairiane' that is part of Praga's still embryonic and unconvincing *maledettismo*.<sup>20</sup> In more recent years, Carolina Nutini

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 29, 55.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 55, 72.

<sup>20</sup> "'Les Fleurs du mal" e la poesia di Emilio Praga', p. 27. Interestingly, a more extremist stance is taken by Roberto Bigazzi, *I colori del vero. Vent'anni di narrativa: 1860-1880* (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1969), p. 140. Bigazzi argues that, in Paris, Praga 'nota non tanto l'uscita dei *Fleurs du mal* (con cui il primo Praga non ha rapporti), quanto del *Réalisme* di Champfleury'.

has stated that in *Tavolozza* Praga introduces ‘temi *maudits*, complice un primo contatto con Baudelaire’.<sup>21</sup>

### 1.3 The Curious Case of ‘La libreria’

Within this general interpretation of *Tavolozza*, many have pointed out the striking similarities between ‘La libreria’ (PP, pp. 61-67) and Baudelaire’s ‘La Voix’ (OC I, p. 170), the latter being, without any doubt, the model on which Praga developed his own poem. For instance, after analysing thematic and verbal similarities (as well as formal differences) between Praga’s and Baudelaire’s representations of the subject of the personal library, Jean-Claude Bouffard affirms that these resemblances ‘n’auraient guère d’importance si Praga n’empruntait aussi à Baudelaire les deux voix tentatrices: celle de la jouissance, de l’appétit triomphant [...], et celle du rêve, du voyage’.<sup>22</sup> Gibellini also discusses the dualistic depiction of the alluring voices that, in both poems, come from the books of the library, though he focuses his insightful study – somewhat marred by inaccuracies in quotations and a genuine preconception with Praga’s mediocrity and alcoholic tendencies – more on the linguistic and stylistic (and ultimately qualitative) *écart* between ‘La libreria’ and ‘La Voix’. Nonetheless, Gibellini examines, from a conceptual point of view, Praga’s different treatment of the notion of ‘dream’ and reverie compared to Baudelaire’s poem, which he attributes to Praga’s (and more generally the Scapigliati’s) ‘frintendimento *poetico* di Baudelaire’.<sup>23</sup> After all, while Baudelaire’s poem concludes with the reassuring voice that suggests to the poet to ‘Garde[r] [s]es

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<sup>21</sup> ‘Sotto “il velo del quietismo”: *Tavolozza* di Emilio Praga’, *La Rassegna della letteratura italiana*, 114, no. 1 (Jan/June 2010), p. 87.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Un disciple de Baudelaire: Emilio Praga’, *Revue de Littérature Comparée*, 45, no. 2 (April/June 1971), pp. 162-163.

<sup>23</sup> ‘La voce di Baudelaire, la libreria di Praga’, p. 63.

songes' (l. 27), for Praga's lyrical I the reverie, the 'fantasia' (l. 160), finally shatters, and the loss of the poet's imaginative power entails a search for comfort in the precious souvenir of the grandmother, namely her old book of prayers (ll. 169-184).

Whilst this dissimilarity in the endings, and more generally in their style, certainly underlines the difference between Baudelaire's and Praga's poetic visions, I do not believe that it is due to the latter's poetic misunderstanding of Baudelaire's work, at least not in the instance of 'La libreria'. Probably in order to distance himself from the obvious model, in the third to last stanza Praga willingly follows what he believed was an anti-idealistic (and anti-Romantic) surge that would later be more openly displayed in *Penombre*, and describes the (realistic) impossibility of continuously sustaining the reverie in order to create poetry. Hence the conclusion focused on youthful memory, the reassuring souvenir, and the image of God: in the speaker's eyes, these elements are all necessary to fill the void created by poetic – as well as moral – disillusionment. In this occasion, Praga's stance, focused on the bitterness of artistic discouragement and the salvific symbol of the souvenir, does not coincide with Baudelaire's. Rather, the conclusion of 'La libreria' shows Praga's re-elaboration and personal appropriation of a Baudelairian theme, which he adapts to his sensibility. This conception of disillusionment in search of the poetic ideal – which entails creative inability – though absent from 'La Voix', is abundantly present in the *Fleurs*,<sup>24</sup> but in Praga it is subjectively adapted to his peculiar situation and vision, inasmuch as it would later be charged with well-defined, and entirely personal, meanings, thereby becoming the veritable emblem of Scapigliatura's poetry

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<sup>24</sup> See for example the sequence of poems 'La Muse malade', 'La Muse vénale', 'Le Mauvais Moine', 'L'Ennemi', and 'Le Guignon' (OC I, pp. 14-17).

(and poets) that best represents the movement's artistic and cultural state of 'in-betweenness'.

There is another reason for the disparity of the two endings. The dualism in 'La Voix' between a voice that tempts the lyrical I to unlimited earthly pleasures and one that lures the poet to travel metaphysically 'Au-delà du possible, au-delà du connu' (l. 10) by means of dreams, is reduced in 'La libreria' to a less complex contrast between mortal body and eternal spirit, that is to say between the human being's search for happiness through lavish physical pleasure and, as Bouffard affirms, 'l'âme qui affirme son essence divine et son immortalité'.<sup>25</sup> Praga's conscious choice of this juxtaposition has specific ties to Baudelaire. The juxtaposition of the physical and the spiritual can be considered as another aspect of Baudelaire's characteristic dualism, displayed in such poems as 'Élévation', which derives from a Romantic (and Platonic) tradition, and particularly through Baudelaire's example would become a pivotal feature of Scapigliatura's poetry at least as much the imagery of poetic dejection, to which it is also related. Indeed, 'Élévation' is the veritable model for the following twenty-second stanza of 'La libreria':

– Bimbo! un altro volume mi dice,  
vivi e alterna i tuoi canti felice!  
Il tuo spirito dal corpo spiccato,  
poi che i liberi cieli ha adorato,  
un volante augeletto sarà;  
un augello di cento colori  
che da un nido contesto di fiori,  
modulando divini concenti,  
e cullato dall'ali dei venti,  
fino al sole il suo vol spingerà! (ll. 140-149)

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<sup>25</sup> 'Un disciple de Baudelaire', p. 163.

In opposition to the alluring ‘godimenti umani’, ‘gioia’, ‘ebbrezza’, and ‘estasi’ (ll. 109-117) of the sensual yet corrupted material world – also negatively characterised by ‘noia’, ‘disinganni’, ‘veleno’, and ‘malanni’ (ll. 118-120) – the dejected poet, who leads a ‘vita’ that is ‘maledetta’ and ‘inutile’ (ll. 122-123), hears another voice that reassures him that eventually his spirit will fly, like a bird, towards a divine and joyful realm. This dualistic juxtaposition or, more precisely, this call for the spirit’s abandonment of the degraded physical world and the human being’s corrupted flesh in a bird-like flight towards spiritual skies, is at the basis of Baudelaire’s ‘Élévation’ (OC I, p. 10). Aside from the similarity of subject matter, Praga employs an analogous – if not parallel – terminology to Baudelaire’s: ‘felice’ and ‘Heureux’; ‘tuo spirito’ and ‘Mon esprit’; ‘spiccato’ and ‘S’élancer’; ‘liberi cieli’, ‘il suo vol spingerà’ and ‘espaces limpides’, ‘Vers les cieux le matin prennent un libre essor’; ‘volante’ and ‘Envole-toi’; ‘augelletto’ and the phonetically similar ‘alouettes’; ‘fiori’ and ‘fleurs’; ‘divini’ and ‘divine’; ‘ali’ and ‘aile’; ‘venti’ and ‘air’; ‘sole’ and ‘soleil’; ‘noia’ and ‘ennuis’; ‘disinganni’, ‘malanni’ and ‘vastes chagrins’; ‘vita’ and ‘existence’. It is certainly possible that the double ‘Au-delà’ that depict the ascensional voyage into dreams in ‘La Voix’ (‘Au-delà du possible, au-delà du connu’) reminded Praga of the analogous repetitions that introduce the spiritual flight in ‘Élévation’, namely the twice-repeated ‘Au-dessus’ (ll. 1) and the thrice-repeated ‘Par-delà’ (ll. 3, 4).

By comparing ‘La libreria’ and ‘Élévation’, we can see that the dualism in both poems is conceptually similar and intertwined with poetic ideals but used in a somewhat different manner. Praga’s search for purity is part of a theological dispute (voiced by the books of the library) on the uncertain existence of the eternal soul that

would eventually determine the bitter ending of the poem, whereas Baudelaire's is subjectively interpreted and part of a more personal portrayal of a joyous sensation.

As Peter Dayan writes:

In all Baudelaire's writings, it is plain that two ideals can be conceived. One is the ideal of evil, of darkness, which passes through a direct, physical, sensuous engagement with the material world [...]. The other ideal is the divine, which escapes such images, and can only be expressed, in poems such as 'Élévation' [...] by a sense, precisely, of beatitude, of intense light, and of space expanded.<sup>26</sup>

'Élévation' shows this interiorisation and assimilation of the dualism between good and evil, which is essentially a medium to convey the speaker's feelings. In Praga, the religious element of this dualism would never be completely abandoned, nor entirely subjectivised; on the contrary, it would be exacerbated in *Penombre*, also constituting a significant feature of Boito's dualistic theories, as seen in Chapter I. What has been defined as 'Baudelaire's obsession with verticality' or, to better delineate it, Baudelaire's obsession with the juxtaposition of earth (or hell) and sky (or heaven),<sup>27</sup> is nevertheless a fundamental symbol in Scapigliatura's poetry, and images of vertical movement are occasionally used by the Scapigliati, alongside more straightforward theological meanings, to express ecstatic impressions and sensations. 'Elevazione' (PP, p. 198), the forty-ninth poem of *Penombre*, does not draw from 'Élévation' only the title.<sup>28</sup> The underlying feeling of happiness that in 'Élévation' causes the speaker's spirit to effortlessly elevate itself towards 'l'air supérieur' (l. 10) in bird-like form is all there in 'Elevazione', in which the poet, when joyously speaking to his mistress, is 'leggero' (l. 2) 'come uno sparviero' (l. 1)

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<sup>26</sup> 'Baudelaire's Wagner: The Indescribable, the Untranslatable, the Inaudible', in *Music Writing Literature, from Sand via Debussy to Derrida* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 34.

<sup>27</sup> Walter Putnam, 'Myth, Metaphor, and Music in "Le Voyage"', in *Understanding 'Les Fleurs du mal: Critical Readings'*, ed. by William J. Thompson, p. 204.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Nardi, *Scapigliatura*, p. 111, note 44.



that flies where the ‘aura pura, fulgida, felice’ (l. 11) is. In an analogous way to the aforementioned twenty-second stanza of ‘La libreria’, Praga’s vocabulary matches Baudelaire’s, particularly in the association between the language of nature and the divine; and, in the very same way as ‘La libreria’, in ‘Elevazione’ Praga introduces a musical idea (apparently) unknown to Baudelaire’s concept of ‘Élévation’. In this poem, Baudelaire wrote that his ‘esprit [...] boi[t], comme une pure et divine liqueur’ (ll. 5, 11) the abovementioned ‘superior air’, and in ‘La libreria’ Praga slightly modified this image by claiming that his ‘spirto’, like an ‘augello di cento colori’, would modulate ‘divini concerti’. In ‘Elevazione’, Praga loses the adjective ‘divine’ retained in ‘La libreria’, but takes on the unusual action of air-drinking from ‘Élévation’, and from ‘La libreria’ the musical harmony that characterises the spiritual elevation: ‘come l’augel che bee l’aure remote / in cui le note / vibran forse degli angeli d’Iddio’ (ll. 3-5).

I have previously deemed the musical notion as apparently absent from Baudelaire’s ‘Élévation’, and this statement is, strictly speaking, true, because in ‘Élévation’ music is not directly mentioned, not even once. Music is, however, an important subject in Baudelaire’s poetic and prose writings, and it is tightly connected to the concept of ‘Élévation’. Dayan underlines this connection when analysing a paragraph from Baudelaire’s article ‘Richard Wagner et *Tannhäuser* à Paris’, first published in April 1861, and shows that the divine ideal, as expressed by the metaphor of the mystical flight in ‘Élévation’, is ‘characteristic, at this point in Baudelaire’s argument, of all music’.<sup>29</sup> The spiritual elevation by means of music, or practices related to music – such as dance – is ultimately the subject matter of

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<sup>29</sup> ‘Baudelaire’s Wagner’, p. 35.

different *Fleurs*, including ‘La Musique’ and ‘Le Serpent qui danse’, where the imagery displayed in ‘Élévation’ is applied to a specific context that can also involve other sensory perceptions.<sup>30</sup> After all, the last line of ‘Élévation’, that is to say the reference to the ‘langage des fleurs et des choses muettes’ (l. 20), prepares the reader for the next sonnet ‘Correspondances’ (OC I, p. 11), which depicts the natural world as a ‘profonde unité’ (l. 6) that speaks a peculiar symbolic language characterised by a close relation between the different senses: ‘Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent’ (l. 8). As we shall see in depth further on, Baudelaire’s approach to musicality, his analogical poetics, synaesthetic ideas, and subjective interpretation of nature interested Praga ever since *Tavolozza*, and these features, if not completely understood by Praga, certainly became part of his own poetry. The correspondence between nature (symbolised by flowers) and different sensory characteristics (colours and sounds) is already shown, if not by means of Baudelairian synaesthesia but of simple conceptual association, in ‘La libreria’ through the image of the surreal hundred-colour bird that sings divinely: ‘un augello di cento colori / che da un nido contesto di fiori, / modulando divini concerti’. It is curious that scholars have repeatedly pointed out the influence of painting and pictorial techniques in *Tavolozza*, which is undeniably obvious, but they have not addressed the issue of the role of songs, dance, and music (especially vocal, but occasionally also instrumental) that is equally conspicuous, considering poems such as ‘Per cominciare’, ‘I pescatori notturni’, ‘Serata in mare’, ‘Orgia’, ‘Il poeta ubbriaco’ [*sic*], and surely ‘La libreria’, to cite only a few. Typically Baudelairian repetition schemes would play a significant role in Praga’s subsequent poetic collections, as scholars have comprehensively

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<sup>30</sup> For ‘La Musique’, see OC I, p. 68; for ‘Le Serpent qui danse’, see Chapter I.2.5 of this study.

documented,<sup>31</sup> and particularly the *pantoum* form featured in ‘Harmonie du soir’ would be the basis for Praga’s 1867 poem ‘Il fanciullo lontano’, from *Trasparenze* (1878).

Praga’s adaptation of Baudelairean elements in ‘La libreria’ can also be seen on a smaller scale, concerning individual images. Following Nardi,<sup>32</sup> Bouffard demonstrates that, beside ‘La Voix’, Praga draws from Baudelaire’s ‘Spleen’ (LXXV) the two separate portrayals of the soul of the dead poet (and his voice) and that of the cat, reworking and turning them into a single one.<sup>33</sup> Praga’s audacious experimentation already displayed in *Tavolozza*, which entails bizarre and peculiar associations, leads him to appropriate some of the most unusual images from the *Fleurs*, such as that which in the 1857 edition concluded the collection, namely the last line of ‘La Mort des artistes’ (OC I, p. 127). Baudelaire describes the hope that death might enhance creativity for the ‘damnés’ artists (l. 10), after a life of fruitless search for the artistic ideal (the ‘Idole’, l. 9), as follows: ‘la Mort [...] Fera s’épanouir les fleurs de leur cerveau’ (ll. 13-14). This very particular metaphor of the flowers of the brain that represent inspiration is reprised by Praga in ‘La libreria’ in which, amongst precise references to ‘La Voix’, it is used in a similar context to ‘La Mort des artistes’ in order to define what appear to be the poet’s first creative efforts: ‘raccolsi del mio cranio / i pochi fiorellini’ (PP, p. 62, ll. 19-20).

The analysis of the sources of ‘La libreria’, a poem that can easily be linked not only to ‘La Voix’ but also ‘Élévation’, ‘Spleen’ (LXXV), and ‘La Mort des artistes’, undoubtedly reveals Praga’s profound interest for Baudelaire at the time of *Tavolozza*. ‘Élévation’, ‘Spleen’ (LXXV), and ‘La Mort des artistes’ were present in

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<sup>31</sup> See for instance Nardi, *Scapigliatura*, p. 181.

<sup>32</sup> *Scapigliatura*, p. 111, note 43.

<sup>33</sup> ‘Un disciple de Baudelaire’, p. 163.

the *Fleurs* since the first edition; ‘La Voix’, instead, was not included in either the 1857 nor the 1861 edition of the *Fleurs* – it was published for the first time in February 1861 in the journal *Revue contemporaine*, therefore barely a year before the publication of *Tavolozza*. It is surely not simple to determine which edition of the *Fleurs* Praga possessed (or simply read) during the writing process of his first collection. If we take into account the Baudelairean elements of the *Schizzi a penna*, which in all probability date to the period 1858-59, as well as the obvious references to nearly all the condemned poems of the first edition that would emerge particularly in *Penombre*, and the scholars’ strong belief that Praga encountered the *Fleurs* in 1858 or 1859, then it is safe to presume that Praga read Baudelaire’s poetry through the 1857 edition.

This hypothesis, however, can be called into question. The Baudelairean image of the soul of the dead poet that in ‘La libreria’ has been taken from ‘Spleen’ (LXXV) as Nardi and Bouffard have suggested, more precisely from the verse ‘L’âme d’un vieux poète erre dans la gouttière’ (OC I, p. 72, l. 7), was in fact drawn from that poem as modified for the 1861 *Fleurs*, as in the first edition Baudelaire speaks of a shadow of the poet, ‘L’ombre’ (OC I, p. 974), and not of his soul. Most likely, Praga possessed, or was aware of, the first edition of the *Fleurs* already in the late 1850s and, considering the strong interest shown in 1861-62 in relation to ‘La libreria’, he also managed to obtain the 1861 *Fleurs* and other journals in which Baudelaire’s poems were published, including a copy of the February 1861 edition of the *Revue contemporaine*.

## 1.4 Baudelairism and ‘Maledettismo Scapigliato’: a More Complex Relationship

Considering the fifty poems constituting *Tavolozza*, published at the very least three years after Praga’s supposed discovery of Baudelaire, of which only seven can surely be deemed to have been written before Praga’s sojourn in Paris,<sup>34</sup> it would be curious if only ‘La libreria’ could be directly connected to Baudelaire, or if there were only traces of that Baudelairism which would be the main characteristic of *Penombre* two years later. Contrarily, I would argue that, beside ‘La libreria’, in *Tavolozza* there are precise references, as well as more vague allusions, to the *Fleurs* which can demonstrate that Praga considered Baudelaire one of his models since his first collection of poetry. Some passages denoting this influence belong to the ordinarily used yet somewhat reductive label ‘maledettismo’, a few of which have already been quoted by scholars; some other sections fall into the category generally conceived as the idyllic or working-class Praga, which have been influenced by Romantic or Bohemian elements of Baudelaire’s poetics; others, finally, cannot be placed under either of those two labels but are the product of an experimentation with poetic material that is undoubtedly Baudelairian. Without striving to contradict the notion of *Penombre* as Praga’s most Baudelairian work, the result of this investigation into the Baudelairian references in *Tavolozza* not only leads to a new reading of Baudelaire’s presence within this collection, but it also affects the study of the entirety of Praga’s work, shifting the focus from a common interpretation of an influence chiefly placed under the banner of ‘maledettismo’ to a more complete evaluation of the relationship between the two authors, as well as of Praga’s own originality with respect to the French poet. Bearing in mind that the categories or

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<sup>34</sup> Namely, those that bear the dates 1858, 1857 or (very oddly) 1853.

labels mentioned above can occasionally overlap even within single poems, the first type of influence analysed is that which has been considered the most obviously Baudelairian, namely that referring to ‘maledettismo scapigliato’.

The first poem to take into account is ‘Nella tomba’ (PP, pp. 57-58), where the macabre images of the worms, the tomb, and the coffin, described with crude realism and a prosaic vocabulary that would be customary traits of *Penombre*, appear all together for the first time in Praga’s work:

Preda dei vermi languidi,  
sarà vendetta mia,  
per entro all’ossa putride  
studiando anatomia,

nuda veder l’origine  
d’ogni mia pena, il cor!  
E la ragion richiedergli  
di tanto e tanto amor...

Poi, bardo estinto, un ultimo  
sospiro accoglierò,  
per ringraziar l’artefice  
che la cassa inchiodò. (ll. 1-12)

Attilio Marinari has rightly associated ‘Nella tomba’ with Baudelaire, asserting that this poem probably has ‘una fonte abbastanza diretta in *Le mort joyeux*’,<sup>35</sup> included in both the 1857 and the 1861 editions of the *Fleurs*. More precisely, Marinari compares the similar terminology that emphasises violent decomposition, characterised by expressions such as ‘vermi languidi’ and ‘per entro all’ossa putride / studiando anatomia’ in Praga, and Baudelaire’s ‘vieux os’ as well as ‘Ô vers! [...] Philosophes viveurs, fils de la pourriture, | À travers ma ruine allez donc sans remords’ (OC I, p. 70, ll. 3, 9, 11-12). Marinari also juxtaposes these representations of the rotting body with the opposite feeling of happiness of the poet who becomes a

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<sup>35</sup> *Emilio Praga, poeta di una crisi* (Naples: Guida, 1969), p. 57.

‘mort libre et joyeux’ (l. 10) in Baudelaire, and similarly ‘ringrazi[a] l’artefice / che la cassa inchiodò’ in Praga, speaking of a ‘contemporaneo bisogno di libertà e di gioia che nutre l’essere del poeta’ about both works.<sup>36</sup> While the two certainly involve an analogous contrast between the macabre first-person depiction of the speaker’s corpse and his yearning for happiness, I believe the similarities go further, comprising the very essence of both compositions and simultaneously displaying Praga’s peculiar treatment of Baudelairian material at the time of *Tavolozza*.

As it usually happens in sonnets, in ‘Le Mort joyeux’ the closing tercet summarises the central theme of the three preceding stanzas, also offering a metaphysical insight on the poetic subject:

Ô vers! [...]

À travers ma ruine allez donc sans remords,  
Et dites-moi s’il est encor quelque torture  
Pour ce vieux corps sans âme et mort parmi les morts! (ll. 9, 12-14)

This last stanza explains why the speaker is, oxymoronically, a ‘joyful dead’: having suffered many torments when he was ‘Vivant’ (l. 7) that caused him to become figuratively ‘ruine’ and a ‘mort parmi les morts’, the lyrical I happily welcomes physical death. He also rhetorically interrogates the worms, which in his solitude become his ‘noirs compagnons sans oreille et sans yeux’ (l. 9), in order to discover if his dead body can experience tortures that he did not know in life, that is to say, greater than what he already suffered. This imperative request made to the worms – which, in the 1857 edition of the *Fleurs*, was a direct question<sup>37</sup> – is indeed rhetorical, implying that corporeal death and physical pain caused by the worms on a

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> See OC I, p. 971.

decomposing body cannot be compared to the more painful type of death, spiritual and emotional, which left the protagonist soulless ('vieux corps sans âme'), hence the willingness to 'dormir dans l'oubli' (l. 4) in 'une fosse profonde' (l. 2) and the joy of being dead.

This very same joy, or appreciation, is present in Praga's 'Nella tomba', and for reasons similar to 'Le Mort joyeux'. If Baudelaire's poet, in a rebellious manner, does not want to 'implorer une larme du monde' (l. 6) while alive, as that 'monde' caused him only 'torture', in 'Nella tomba' the speaker's grudge is not against the world but, rather more masochistically, against himself: his corpse would suffer a 'vendetta' and be gnawed by the worms in order to discover the origin of all his suffering in life, namely to (physically) see his (metaphorical) heart, and interrogate it on the reason for all his love and passions. In the two poems the boundaries between life and death, and between the physical and the emotional, are constantly put into question, and the poet is assumed to be both alive and dead at the same time, as if he were buried and eaten alive by worms while still demanding information about his torments. Finally, in 'Nella tomba' the 'bardo', who is already 'estinto', wants to 'ringraziar l'artefice / che la cassa inchiodò', probably because, as in Baudelaire's sonnet, he has suffered too much in life and is now glad to be dead; unlike 'Le Mort joyeux', however, he is not left without a soul, his agony derived from having loved too much: 'la ragion richiedergli / di tanto e tanto amor'. Praga also appropriates Baudelaire's rebellious stance against religious burial practices ('Je hais les testaments et je hais les tombeaux', l. 5), turning it into an anti-clerical criticism of funerals:

e alla chiesa cattolica



perdonar, nella quiete,  
il puzzo delle esequie,  
e il brontolio del prete! (ll. 13-16)

‘Nella tomba’ demonstrates Praga’s personal adaptation of Baudelairian themes since *Tavolozza*, which in this instance cannot be dismissed simply as embryonic ‘maledettismo’ related to a macabre appropriation of Baudelaire’s realistic representations. Praga’s aim to shock and discombobulate the reader is obvious in the poem, as it would be obvious in Praga’s later work, but in ‘Nella tomba’ his Baudelairism is also characterised by a more profound juxtaposition of cemeterial terms (‘vermi languidi’; ‘ossa putride’) and abstract images (‘l’origine / d’ogni mia pena, il cor’; ‘amor’), which the crude realism charges with further emotional meaning. This contrasting passage from a positive-scientific examination of the physical heart to the investigation of its feelings also features in one of Arrigo Boito’s most Baudelairian poems, ‘Lezione d’anatomia’, as we have seen in Chapter I.1.4.

Many poems of the *Fleurs* display two different (and intrinsically opposite) levels, which are juxtaposed in order to create a peculiar, picturesque (and occasionally oxymoronic) scene, as well as to emphasise the idea that lies behind this very scene: one that is *macabre-realistic*; and another level that can be deemed as *abstract*, which conveys emotions, sensations, or metaphysical reflections. Among the three poets of Scapigliatura analysed in our study, this type of juxtaposition influenced Camerana most of all (see Chapter III.5); as has been shown with ‘Nella tomba’, however, Praga was aware of, and experimented with, this technique too. Other than ‘Le Mort joyeux’, another example of this Baudelairian method can be found in the sonnet ‘Remords posthume’ (OC I, pp. 34-35) addressed to a ‘belle

ténébreuse' (l. 1) who is imagined, in a similar fashion to 'Le Mort joyeux' and 'Nella tomba', as being alive and dead at the same time (or buried alive) in a grave, as the expression 'Lorsque tu dormiras [...] Au fond d'un monument construit en marbre noir' (ll. 1-2) suggests. The whole poem is structured upon the interplay between the two levels just discussed: the stone that will impede the mistress' 'cœur' from both physically 'battre' and emotionally 'vouloir' (l. 7); the anthropomorphised image of the 'tombeau', symbol of physical decomposition, 'confident' of the 'rêve infini' (l. 9) of the poet that entails a macabre revenge towards the lover, which asks the poetic subject what is the benefit 'De n'avoir pas connu ce que pleurent les morts' (l. 13), namely love; and, in the concluding line, the unusual association of the worm that concretely gnaws the mistress's corpse with the feeling of remorse: 'Et le ver rongera ta peau comme un remords' (l. 14). It is not the link between the bite of the worm and remorse *per se* that is unusual, but the inversion of roles: in this case, the simile entails a forced (and entirely intentional) passage from a material to an abstract image, hence oddly comparing the pain caused by the bite of the worm to the emotional suffering caused by remorse, and not the opposite.

'Remords posthume' would later be the obvious model for Praga's 'Vendetta postuma' (PP, pp. 179-180), the thirty-seventh poem of *Penombre*.<sup>38</sup> Given the similarities in topic and vocabulary between 'Remords posthume', 'Nella tomba', and 'Vendetta postuma', a direct influence is highly probable. While depicting a different scene, 'Nella tomba' shares the same borderline situation between life and death as 'Vendetta postuma' and 'Remords posthume', as well as the same desire for macabre (and violent) revenge, with a typical juxtaposition of different levels of

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<sup>38</sup> See Croce, p. 154; Carnazzi, p. 31.

meaning. In ‘Vendetta postuma’, it is the poet’s mistress who simultaneously is ‘immobile e stecchita’ (l. 2) and yet might have ‘nel cranio un sentimento / di questa vita’ (ll. 3-4). Praga employs analogous expressions in ‘Nella tomba’ and ‘Vendetta postuma’, highlighting the contrast between a former life of love, suffering, and passion, and a future tomb where the emphasis is on the (posthumous?) actions of the poetic subject, the languid worms, and the protagonist’s heart considered in both a figurative and a concrete manner: ‘tomba’, ‘vermi languidi’, ‘vendetta’, ‘ossa’, ‘cor’, ‘amor’, ‘ringraziar’, in the former; and ‘Vendetta’, ‘freddo monumento’, ‘cranio’, ‘amori’, ‘vermi’, ‘gioia’, ‘cuore’, in the latter.

This association between graveyard images and the simultaneous feeling of attraction-repulsion towards love or the lover is also present in ‘Alla riva’ (PP, pp. 18-19), written in June 1860. This composition opens with a Romantic and idyllic depiction of the ‘riva del mare’ (l. 1), where the ‘brezza’ (l. 6) is ‘salubre’ (l. 5) and the poet wants the ‘fanciulla’ (l. 5) to join him on the beach. The third and fourth stanzas overturn this situation, and introduce a contradictory representation of the poet’s relationship with his mistress. The poet tells this latter: ‘Vieni meco’ (l. 17), and wants her ‘alla riva / per mostrar[le] l’immenso oceano’ (ll. 17-18), but only to say to her (not without a mocking tone) that ‘al lido lontano volere[bbe] per poter[la] fuggir’ (ll. 19-20). This contrasting standpoint is explained with the following verses, which describe a relationship that is characterised by the sufferings of an unquenchable desire:

Vieni meco: io ti voglio alla spiaggia  
 perché innanzi a quest’orridi abissi,  
 i desir, da cui siam crocefissi,  
 potran forse umiliati svanir. (ll. 21-24)

To be sure, the image of the crucifixion by voracious desires (unquestionably carnal) suggests a combination of profane voluptuousness and sacredness typical of poems by Baudelaire such as ‘Franciscae Meae Laudes’, ‘Chanson d’après-midi’, or ‘Que diras-tu ce soir...’, also taken up in many other poems of *Tavolozza* and *Penombre*. The speaker attempts to detach himself from this painful relationship through the confrontation with the immensity of nature, which is here seen in a Romantic manner as a frightful yet redeeming force: the expressions ‘l’immenso oceano’ and ‘orridi abissi’ may be a reminiscent of Leopardi’s ‘abisso orrido, immenso’ from the ‘Canto notturno di un pastore errante dell’Asia’.<sup>39</sup> In the fourth and last stanza, however, there is further interaction between an apparent sentimentalism (‘Per mostrarti [...] l’orme nostre’, ll. 25-26) and the poet’s actual feelings, which are represented by an image of death and physical decomposition (‘come fosse di piccoli morti’ l. 27), and insolently he asks his mistress, who has now become despised (‘o indegna’, l. 39), if the wind shall eventually ‘distruggere le traccie [*sic*] che impresse / m’ha un tuo sguardo, un tuo detto nel cor!’ (ll. 31-32).

In ‘Alla riva’, the poetic elements that might be gathered under the label ‘maledettismo’ allow for the overturning of a Romantic and idealistic scene to a very different conception of a love relationship. There, oppositions mark the simultaneous feelings of attraction to and loathing of the inescapable and dangerous woman: on the one hand ‘Vieni meco’, which is repeated four times as a love call to the mistress and is twice used together with the sensual (and intrinsically sexual) expression ‘io ti voglio’ (ll. 17, 21); on the other the speaker’s attempts to flee her that are indeed doubtful (‘volerei per poterti fuggir’, ‘potran forse’, ‘se il vento’, ll. 20, 24, 29). The

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<sup>39</sup> *Canti*, ed. by Lucio Felici, 4th edn (Rome: Newton Compton, 2016), p. 149, l. 35.

‘contrasto donna-poeta, un contrasto che è insieme accordo, *odi et amo* implacabile e violento’, which is emblematic of *Penombre* and according to Mariani is ‘Baudelairiano, nella sua intima struttura’,<sup>40</sup> is then already very much present in *Tavolozza*. And as a matter of fact, in ‘À celle qui est trop gaie’, one of the compositions of the 1857 edition that were eventually condemned, Baudelaire synthetically summarises his feelings towards the woman in the following manner: ‘Je te hais autant que te je t’aime’ (OC I, p. 157, l. 16).

This *odi et amo* that represents the frigid and indifferent mistress in *Tavolozza* is not exclusive of ‘Alla riva’. While featuring an anti-clerical attitude and Bohemian expressions emphasising the noble poverty of the artist typical of *Tavolozza*, ‘Verità’ anticipates in themes and depiction of the woman the four individual poems entitled ‘Dama elegante’ of *Penombre*. If Praga had defined the lover as ‘o indegna’ in ‘Alla riva’, in ‘Verità’ the speaker calls her ‘cruda e severa’, ‘inespugnabile / mia bella trinciera’, and ‘ritrosa romana’ (PP, p. 56, ll. 6-8, 14). This last metaphor portraying the cold and unconquerable woman, associating conquests of love with those of war, would be reprised in the following lines taken from the third ‘Dama elegante’, in which the lyrical I tells the ‘bella donna’: ‘donna sdegnosa, / m’han raccontato che nessun ti agguaglia / nella battaglia’ (PP, p. 144, ll. 1-4).

In ‘Suicidio’, the feminine figures become ‘belle indolenti’ (PP, p. 32, l. 5), which closely recalls the ‘chère indolente’ of Baudelaire’s ‘Le Serpent qui danse’ (OC I, p. 29, l.1). Praga seems to take the cue from Baudelaire’s description of the frigidity of the mistress, which in ‘Le Serpent qui danse’ is associated with jewels, metals, and fine cloths: the dancing body of the ‘chère indolente’ is compared to ‘une

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<sup>40</sup> *Storia della Scapigliatura*, p. 239.

étouffe vacillante' (l. 3), and her eyes to 'deux bijoux froids où se mêle / L'or avec le fer' (OC I, p. 30, ll. 15-16). As for other poems of *Tavolozza*, Praga adapts the Baudelairian material to his current sensibility, thus juxtaposing the 'metallo' carelessly given to the 'belle indolenti / tramutato in tessuti e in gioielli' to the admirable suicide of the young and poor artist: 'mentre intorno mieteva fratelli / la miseria suffusa d'onor!' (ll. 5-8).

It is not by chance that in *Tavolozza* Praga draws from Baudelaire both the conception of the 'chère indolente' (an expression also employed in 'L'Amour du mensonge', OC I, p. 98, l. 1) and the link between the sensuality (and simultaneous frigidity) of the woman, jewellery, and precious clothing, which is a recurring subject in Baudelaire's poetry.<sup>41</sup> 'Larve eleganti' is undoubtedly another antecedent of the four poems entitled 'Dama elegante'. Here the speaker discusses the 'seducenti forme' (PP, p. 45, l. 10) of these 'Larve eleganti' that are considered as ghosts of youthful desires, that is to say phantoms of 'fanciulle inebriate / di danze avvicendate' (ll. 21-22) that now reside in his joyful yet blurred 'memoria' (which is compared to 'nebbia nei boschi caduta', l. 1), and the poet describes these attractive 'Larve' as becoming alive in front of him, dancing ('e veggo omeri bianchi [...]', l. 13). In the speaker's memory, these 'fanciulle' had 'occhi mesti e pupille accese e nere' (l. 15),<sup>42</sup> and they wore 'vezzi', 'trine' and, on their hair, 'gemme e perle e corone immortali / di fiori artificiali' (ll. 26-28), but they did not deem the young poet worthy of their 'baci', nor of their 'santo affetto' (l. 19) – particularly noteworthy are the combination of eroticism and sacredness, close to the 'saintes

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<sup>41</sup> See, amongst the numerous examples, 'Les Bijoux', 'Avec ses vêtements...', or 'Je te donne ces vers...'.  
<sup>42</sup> As Mariani, p. 236, again writes discussing the symbolism of the black pupils of the woman in *Penombre*, these "pupille nere" [...] son del più alto Baudelaire'.

voluptés' of Baudelaire's 'Bénédiction' (OC I, p. 9, l. 60), and the use of military terms such as 'torme' and 'schiere'. A similar subject to this is treated by Baudelaire in the four sonnets that compose 'Un fantôme', first published in 1860 in *L'Artiste* and then included in the 1861 *Fleurs*.<sup>43</sup> In 'Un fantôme' all the main elements of 'Larve eleganti' are present: the sensual 'spectre' of a 'belle visiteuse'<sup>44</sup> that comes out of the poet's happy yet dim 'mémoire' and becomes alive ('Que reste-t-il? [...] Rien qu'un dessin fort pâle'),<sup>45</sup> and the contrast between the present and the past tenses (the latter employed to describe the memory related to the ghost); the 'yeux si fervents et si tendres'<sup>46</sup> of the phantom 'noire et pourtant lumineuse';<sup>47</sup> the 'bijoux, [...] métaux, dorure' of the ghost that in the poet's memory moved its body as if it were dancing ('lente ou brusque, à chaque mouvement / Montrait la grâce enfantine du singe').<sup>48</sup>

'Un fantôme' would later influence 'La festa e l'alcova' of *Penombre*, which develops and elaborates the following Baudelairian image portraying the mistress' sensual act of dressing:

Ainsi bijoux, [...] métaux, dorure  
S'adaptaient juste à sa rare beauté;  
Rien n'offusquait sa parfaite clarté,  
Et tout semblait lui servir de bordure.

[...] elle noyait  
Sa nudité voluptueusement

Dans les baisers du satin et du linge. ('Le Cadre', ll. 5-8, 9-11)

<sup>43</sup> The idea of dancing ghosts appearing from a memory is also at the core of 'Que diras-tu ce soir...' and 'L'Aube spirituelle' (OC I, pp. 43, 46).

<sup>44</sup> 'Les Ténèbres' (OC I, p. 38, ll. 10, 13).

<sup>45</sup> 'Le Portrait' (OC I, p. 40, ll. 7-8, 13).

<sup>46</sup> 'Le Portrait' (l. 3).

<sup>47</sup> 'Les Ténèbres' (l. 14).

<sup>48</sup> 'Le Cadre' (OC I, p. 39, l. 5; p. 40, ll. 13-14).

‘La festa e l’alcova’ begins with this very image, with the line ‘Ella era nuda come un fior d’Iddio / [...] / però pel ballo si adornava’ (PP, p. 121, ll. 1, 3), which also recalls the opening of ‘Les Bijoux’, namely ‘La très chère était nue, et [...] n’avait gardé que ses bijoux sonores’ (OC I, p. 158, ll. 1-2). The speaker then observes the ‘tessuti’ and ‘gioielli’ of the mistress (l. 7); he notes ‘arrivar la bianca camiciuola, / [...] [che] si adagiò sul profumato petto / come una stola’ (ll. 14-16), as well as ‘le perle arrivâr, tremule faci, / a lambir mollemente il suo candore, / come i [suo]i baci [del poeta]’ (PP, p. 122, ll. 26-28). These pearls are not the only jewels worn by the poet’s mistress, as on the ‘lungo crin’ (l. 33) she carries a ‘bianca camelia artificiale’ (l. 38). Apart from the similarities between ‘Un fantôme’ and ‘La festa e l’alcova’, interesting for the current analysis is the fact that in *Penombre* Praga uses the same objects and vocabulary already displayed in *Tavolozza* in order to depict the simultaneous sensuality and coldness of the woman: cloths and jewels (‘nei tessuti e nei gioielli’), as in ‘Suicidio’ (‘in tessuti e in gioielli’); the whiteness of her skin (‘a lambir mollemente il suo candore’), similar to ‘Larve eleganti’ (‘e veggo omeri bianchi’); and ‘perle’ and the ‘camelia artificiale’, an artificial flower, on her hair, as in ‘Larve eleganti’ (‘perle e corone immortali / di fiori artificiali’). Certainly, in *Penombre* Praga plunges into the depth of Baudelaire’s depiction of the love (and sexual) relationship, emerging with elements not yet seen in *Tavolozza*. In *Tavolozza* this Baudelairian cue is taken less deeply – it has a specific function within the poem, tailored to convey Praga’s personal (and diverse) messages or impressions, and it is not always connected to the concept of ‘maledettismo scapigliato’. In ‘Larve eleganti’, for instance, the gloomy and disconsolate tone of ‘Un fantôme’ is transformed into a celebration of youthful memory, and of youthful erotic longings



(the ‘palpiti strani’, PP, p. 45, l. 9), that is to say the ‘giorni sacri al primo amore’ (l. 3); in ‘Suicidio’, the ‘belle indolenti’ collecting ‘metallo’ and wearing ‘tessuti’ and ‘gioielli’ serve only as introduction and means of contrast to the desperate story of the poor artist, as we shall see next.

## 1.5 ‘Suicidio’: Corpses, Paintings, and Bohemian Artists

The tale of the unfortunate painter narrated in ‘Suicidio’ bears other distinctively Baudelairian features deriving, most particularly, from the *ekphrasis* ‘Une martyre’ (OC I, pp. 111-113) subtitled ‘Dessin d’un Maître inconnu’, partly analysed in Chapter I.1.4. The first stanza describes the variety of precious and refined objects that decorate the ‘chambre tiède’ (l. 5) where ‘L’air est dangereux et fatal’ (l. 6), which acts as background to the painting (and, indeed, to the poem itself):

Au milieu des flacons, des étoffes lamées  
Et des meubles voluptueux,  
Des marbres, des tableaux, des robes parfumées  
Qui traînent à plis somptueux. (ll. 1-4)

In the midst of these rich items, lying down on a bed, is the mutilated ‘cadavre sans tête’ of a woman ‘bien jeune encor!’ (ll. 9, 41). The poem progresses with the juxtaposition of the macabre-realistic features of the corpse with the luxurious jewels and clothing that the cadaver is still wearing: firstly, there is the severed head with the ‘yeux révulsés’ (l. 20) that ‘[r]epose’ on the ‘table de nuit’, adorned by ‘ses bijoux précieux’ (ll. 16-18); then the ‘tronc nu sans scrupules’ is described (l. 21); and finally there are the fine ‘bas rosâtre, orné de coins d’or, à la jambe’ (l. 25) and the garter that ‘Darde un regard diamanté’ (l. 28). The juxtaposition of, on the one hand, the decapitated corpse, which includes terms such as ‘cadavre impur’ (l. 49),

Un cadavre sans tête épanche, comme un fleuve,  
 Sur l'oreiller désaltéré  
 Un sang rouge et vivant, dont la toile s'abreuve  
 Avec l'avidité d'un pré. (ll. 9-12)

<sup>50</sup> See, for instance, the 1863 'Éloge du maquillage' from *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* already discussed in the Introduction.

Alternatively, similes are employed to charge artificial objects with human emotionality: ‘La jarretière, ainsi qu’un œil secret qui flambe, / Darde un regard diamanté’ (ll. 27-28). Not unlike his poem ‘Une charogne’, in ‘Une martyre’ the image of the corpse is artistically transfigured and is represented, at least in the first half of the poem, as a beautiful painting, as a ‘grand portrait langoureux’ (l. 30).

Praga’s ‘Suicidio’ (PP, pp. 32-33) opens in a similar fashion to ‘Une martyre’, namely with the first two stanzas creating an atmosphere of richness and luxury:

Oh tesor negli scrigni giacenti,  
oh dovizie all’azzardo diffuse,  
e cui spesso sbadata profuse  
una man che ignorava il dolor!

Oh metallo alle belle indolenti  
tramutato in tessuti e in gioielli,  
mentre intorno mieteva fratelli  
la miseria suffusa d’onor! (ll. 1-8)

The terms ‘tesor’, ‘scrigni’, ‘dovizie’, ‘metallo’, ‘tessuti’, and ‘gioielli’ are used to represent a world characterised by opulence and extravagant squandering, not dissimilar to that of ‘Une martyre’. Analogous is the sudden introduction, in the third stanza, of the portrayal of the corpse of a young person, which starkly clashes with the precious items previously described:

Ecco un cadavere  
d’adolescente;  
guardate, è un pallido  
volto sofferente. (ll. 9-12)

If the dead body in Baudelaire’s poem belongs to a woman who ‘est bien jeune encor!’, in Praga’s it is that of an ‘adolescente’ and ‘giovinetto’ (l. 35) with a ‘pallido / volto’; noteworthy for this examination is that Boito in ‘Lezione d’anatomia’ (OL, pp. 74-76), written in 1865, would draw from both ‘Une martyre’ and ‘Suicidio’ for

the depiction of the 'cadavere' (l. 82) of a 'pallida / adolescente' (ll. 73-74) who 'era giovane!' (l. 22) and had a 'bianco volto' (l. 66).

In spite of the similar opening and the juxtaposition of macabre and precious elements, 'Suicidio' and 'Une martyre' only share few features on more properly thematic and conceptual levels. As in many other compositions of *Tavolozza*, the subject of Praga's poem is a painter, a desperate 'Artista [...] povero' who 'lottò sperando' and has eventually decided to kill himself because of shortage and hunger, 'quando [...] alla sua soglia / picchiò il digiuno' (ll. 17-24). The opposition in Baudelaire between the beauty of artificial objects and the ugliness (and simultaneous appeal) of finite reality becomes in Praga a contrast between richness and poverty, or better between an indifferent bourgeoisie and the shattered dreams of a poor artist who has experienced the cruel side of reality. What we can see here is both an influence and a substantial difference from Baudelaire's poetics: Praga's conception of nature is still mostly Romantic, as already seen, for example, in 'Alla riva'. Even in *Penombre*, where the thematic substrate, for the most part, changes focus, switching from exterior to interior settings, Praga does not alter his fundamental idea that beauty is inherently natural, although his point of observation of nature, through Baudelaire's influence, becomes progressively more subjective (there were already several indications of this in *Tavolozza*).

The subject matter treated in 'Une martyre' and 'Suicidio' is also profoundly different. Baudelaire's subject is a young girl who experienced 'un amour ténébreux', attended 'des fêtes étranges / Pleines de baisers infernaux' (ll. 32-34), and was eventually murdered and mutilated by her husband, a man emphatically defined as 'vindicatif' (l. 45). Baudelaire highlights the depraved experiences made by the

female subject, and juxtaposes the description of the decapitated corpse with that of her soul while alive, which is portrayed as dramatically overcome by ennui:

Et cependant, à voir la maigreur élégante  
De l'épaule au contour heurté,  
[...]  
Elle est bien jeune encor! – Son âme exaspérée  
Et ses sens par l'ennui mordus  
S'étaient-ils entr'ouverts à la meute altérée  
Des désirs errants et perdus? (ll. 36-37, 41-44)

In Praga's poem, although the contrast between the depiction of macabre cadaver and immaterial soul is retained, the corpse's soul has not been stained by boredom, sin, and immoral desires – on the contrary, it was lively and unadulterated when the artist died:

Ecco un cadavere  
d'adolescente;  
guardate, è un pallido  
volto sofferente:  
vi brillò un'anima  
fervida, pura...  
la spense il turbine  
della sciagura. (ll. 9-16)

Praga's choice of a gentle-hearted yet poor artist, whose noble features are put into contrast with the realistic description of his corpse, emphasises even more the desperate situation behind his suicide. Praga's unvarnished treatment of this grim subject matter, which was rather new in the Italian literary scene of the 1860s is, undoubtedly, different to Baudelaire's. The core image and the principal juxtapositions of 'Une martyre', however, are also present in 'Suicidio', and the more thoroughly the poem is analysed, the more well-defined the Baudelairian influence appears.

Baudelaire draws on Christian imagery for the definition of his subject as a ‘martyre’, but she is no religious martyr – she is a ‘martyre’ of love, who ‘Malgré tant d’amour’ for her husband could not ‘assouvir [...] L’immensité de son désir’ (ll. 46, 48). Similarly, Praga’s artist is addressed as ‘O martire!’ (l. 25), but he is not a religious martyr either, he is instead a martyr of art or of his desperate love for art: ‘Addio pennelli, tavolozza addio / sacra all’oblio! / [...] / addio dell’arte amori / coronati di fiori’ (ll. 34-35, 40-41).

The two closing stanzas of ‘Suicidio’, the seventh and eighth, highlight Praga’s debt to ‘Une martyre’ even more. Both poems end with the image of the spirit of a protagonist who, in opposition to the previous vivid depiction of the corpse, has finally found a sort of peace, thus escaping the offensive judgement of the sordid yet condemnatory world. Baudelaire writes:

– Loin du monde railleur, loin de la foule impure,  
Loin des magistrats curieux,  
Dors en paix, dors en paix, étrange créature,  
Dans ton tombeau mystérieux;  
  
Ton époux court le monde, et ta forme immortelle  
Veille près de lui quand il dort. (ll. 53-58)

Praga’s lines, in comparison, are the following:

O fuggito alle infamie del mondo,  
vola, vola, ti bea nel sereno,  
coraggioso, che il calice pieno  
hai gettato alle spine del suol!  
  
Or, dal cielo, tu, artista giocondo,  
alle tele incompilate sorridi,  
e dell’arte degli uomini ridi,  
dipingendo coi raggi del sol! (ll. 43-50)

Both Baudelaire and Praga represent their final scenes with a compassionate tone towards the protagonist; as Jackson writes, Baudelaire's conclusion is 'un acte de compréhension' as much as an 'acte de sympathie profonde' for the feminine subject.<sup>51</sup> If Baudelaire employs the adjective 'Loin', which implies a well-deserved escape from life and reality, Praga uses the past participle with the adjectival function 'fuggito', and substitutes Baudelaire's 'monde railleur' and 'foule impure' with an expression that cleverly combines these two phrases, therefore emphasising the vulgarity and bigotry of the contemporary world: 'infamie del mondo'. Praga also takes up the immediate repetition of a phrase directly addressed to the subject, which while in Baudelaire's poem defines the peaceful eternal sleep in a 'tombeau mystérieux' of the protagonist ('Dors en paix, dors en paix'), in 'Suicidio' refers to the final liberation in death ('vola, vola'). The Baudelairian reference to a solitary and mysterious 'tomb' and peaceful eternal rest can still be found in another section of 'Suicidio', namely in the fifth stanza, together with Praga's typical anti-clerical stance: 'O martire! / riposa in pace; / presso il tuo feretro / non splende face, / ricusa il tempio / questa tua salma' (ll. 25-30). In the seventh and eighth stanzas of the poem, Praga thoroughly develops Baudelaire's allusion to the martyr's 'forme immortelle'. If, at first glance, in 'Une martyre' this 'forme immortelle' seems to be an acknowledgment of the possibility of the immortal soul, and a religious idealisation of death, this is in fact a deeply sarcastic statement, as we have seen in Chapter I.1.4 when discussing 'Une martyre' in conjunction with Boito's 'Lezione d'anatomia'. Nevertheless, in Praga's poem this suggestion of an 'immortal form' becomes the veritable sublimation of a gloomy subject (the 'Suicidio') that entails

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<sup>51</sup> 'La Dialectique des images', p. 167.

final redemption through a pantheistic union with nature ('dipingendo coi raggi del sol').

All references to painting in 'Suicidio' ('Artista', 'pennelli', 'tavolozza', 'arte', 'tele', 'dipingendo') are not employed only as subject matter of the poem, as part of the narration of the story of the ill-fated painter. As Nardi has eloquently stated, Praga 'è il primo nostro poeta impressionista' with a 'prepotente concezione coloristica' and a 'gusto della macchietta' also in poetry, which recalls the '*quadretto di genere*'.<sup>52</sup> Some of these pictorial characteristics, showing the aesthetic influence of painting, are also evident in 'Suicidio', but in this poem they do not derive specifically from actual artistic techniques. Although the pictorial portrayal is less conspicuous, the structure of 'Suicidio' and the methodology behind it bear many similarities with 'Une martyre' that, as already specified, is an *ekphrasis* of a 'Dessin d'un Maître inconnu'. As a matter of fact, 'il n'est pas difficile de voir comment le poème [Une martyre] vise à la mise en place d'un effet plastique ou pictural, que soulignent d'ailleurs certains termes empruntés au lexique de la peinture',<sup>53</sup> which certainly influenced the composition of Praga's 'Suicidio'. Both poems move from a third person description of physical appearance (in the present tense) to the previous life (in the past tense) of the corpse. This also involves verbs and nouns related to displaying, looking, and viewing, which help to paint a voyeuristic scene dedicated to hypothetical observers who appear to look at a work of visual art: 'Un cadavre sans tête épanche', 'La tête [...] Repose', 'Le singulier *aspect* de cette solitude / [...] *Révèle*' (ll. 29, 32), '*à voir* la maigreur élégante' (l. 37, my italics), 'Son âme exaspérée / Et ses sens [...] S'étaient-ils entr'ouverts', in 'Une martyre'; and '*Ecco*

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<sup>52</sup> *Scapigliatura*, pp. 92-93.

<sup>53</sup> Jackson, 'La Dialectique des images', p. 165.



un cadavere d'adolescente; / *guardate*, è un pallido / volto sofferente' (my italics), 'Artista [...] lottò sperando', 'Si spense' (l. 25) in 'Suicidio'. The lyrical I then finally addresses the poetic subject directly in the second person singular, with expressions such as 'ton tombeau', 'ta forme' ('Une martyre'), and 'ti bea', 'tu, artista' ('Suicidio'), in a sort of silent conversation with the corpse that denotes the speaker's empathy towards its situation, as previously shown in the two concluding stanzas.

'Suicidio' bears some similarities also with 'La Mort des artistes', which Enrico Zucchi considers 'the most important model for *Suicidio*'.<sup>54</sup> To be sure, if 'Une martyre' provided Praga with vocabulary, images, poetic techniques, and aesthetic (as well as conceptual) juxtapositions, 'La Mort des artistes' supplied him with a genuine *bohémien* subject, which includes, once again, an equivocal idealistic conclusion similar to that of 'Une martyre'. Praga was certainly aware of 'La Mort des artistes': as Zucchi argues, with 'Suicidio' this poem shares a similar Bohemian theme (the death of misunderstood and ill-fated artists) and closing image (the association of death with the sun conceived as a regenerative force).<sup>55</sup> The two compositions are, however, profoundly different in terms of their arguments (metapoetic in 'La Mort des artistes'; polemical against the bourgeoisie in 'Suicidio') and underlying messages on the salvific and cleansing role of death for the artist (ambiguously hopeful in Baudelaire; unequivocally certain, also involving a religious-like afterlife, in Praga).

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<sup>54</sup> 'Emilio Praga's *Suicidio*: From Alfierian to Baudelairean Suicide', in *Voglio morire! Suicide in Italian Literature, Culture, and Society 1789-1919*, ed. by Paolo L. Bernardini and Anita Virga (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2013), p. 125.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 127-128.

On a purely conceptual aspect, the ending of ‘Suicidio’ is closer to a more optimistic Baudelairian composition, ‘Bénédiction’ (OC I, pp. 7-9). This features another subject derived from the topic of the unappreciated poet despised by the contemporary world who, after (and precisely because of) a life of suffering (‘la douleur est la noblesse unique’, l. 65), finds his appropriate and ‘bienheureux’ place (ll. 61-62) in the ‘Ciel, où son œil voit un trône splendide’ (l. 53). As Robb writes, the Bohemian-Romantic topic of ‘L’artiste infortuné, dont la vie quotidienne est d’autant plus poignante qu’il est censé habiter des régions mythiques, occupe une place évidente dans la poésie de Baudelaire’.<sup>56</sup> ‘Bénédiction’ is dotted with religious vocabulary (‘Soyez béni’, ‘divin’, ‘saintes Légions’, ‘couronne mystique’, and so forth, OC I, p. 9), and the idealistic ending shares many resemblances with the conclusion of ‘Suicidio’. It is possible to compare the latter’s focus on the sufferings of life (‘miseria’, ‘volto soffrente’), happiness in death (‘artista giocondo’), verticality (‘vola, vola’, ‘dal cielo’), clearness (‘ti bea nel sereno’), rays of light (‘raggi’, ‘sol’), and inadequacy of the human compared to the divine (‘alle tele incompilate sorridi, / e dell’arte degli uomini ridi’) with several sections of ‘Bénédiction’, most particularly with the following lines:

À ce beau diadème *éblouissant et clair*;

Car il ne sera fait que de *pure lumière*,  
 Puisée au foyer saint des *rayons* primitifs,  
 Et dont les *yeux mortels*, dans leur *splendeur* entière,  
 Ne sont que des miroirs obscurcis et plaintifs! (ll. 72-76, my italics)

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<sup>56</sup> *La Poésie de Baudelaire*, p. 128.

## 1.6 The Poet Against Society: the *Fleurs* and Praga's Ideas on Nature and the Arts

The subject of 'Suicidio' can be considered as part of the Bohemian thematics concerning the vagabond life, joys, and struggles of the poor and disadvantaged artist, which comprises several poems of *Tavolozza*. This category may include the opening poem 'Per cominciare', which sets the tone of the whole collection. This is another poem that comes close to the Romantic-Bohemian theme treated in 'Bénédiction', itself the first composition of the 'Spleen et Idéal' section of the *Fleurs*. In 'Per cominciare', a 'voce incognita' (PP, p. 7, l. 1) – a veritable guardian angel that recalls the voices in 'La libreria' – celebrates the young age of the naïve ('puro e vergine', l. 23) but suffering poet ('dolente hai l'anima', l. 3), simultaneously warning him, who heroically does not listen, of the dangers of society that would severely mistreat him for being a poet and a 'girovago cantore' (PP, p. 9, l. 70). The voice suggests the speaker withdraw into 'le domestiche / pareti' and 'be[re] in pace e in silenzio al / [s]uo nappo dorato', in order to escape 'l'aurea del mondo infetto' because 'là fuori de' [s]uoi carnefici / Echeggia l'ululato' (PP, p. 8, ll. 25-32). This appears to be a variation on the main topic treated in 'Bénédiction', where Praga retains the core theme and some features of Baudelaire's composition, and turns them into a poem about overcoming the fear of publishing a collection of poetry in an antagonistic society dedicated solely to industry and wealth. In 'Bénédiction' the childlike, utterly innocent, and naïve 'Poète' (l. 2) is 'sous la tutelle invisible d'un Ange' (l. 21) that 'le suit dans son pèlerinage' and 'Pleure de le voir gai' (ll. 27-28); the guiding angel follows the poet who 'apparaît en ce monde ennuyé' (l. 2), defiantly sings about his painful 'chemin de la croix' (l. 26) and 'dans tout ce qu'il boit et dans tout ce qu'il mange / Retrouve l'ambrosie et le nectar vermeil' (ll. 23-

24), but the hostile ‘peuples furieux’ (l. 56) ‘font sur lui l’essai de leur férocité’ (l. 32).

The resemblances between ‘Une martyre’, ‘La Mort des artistes’, and ‘Bénédiction’ on the one hand, and ‘Suicidio’ as well as ‘Per cominciare’ on the other, show two very significant characteristics of Praga’s relationship with the *Fleurs* at the time of *Tavolozza*, and corroborate two hypotheses on this relationship formulated in this chapter: 1) Baudelaire’s influence on *Tavolozza* is not limited to shocking images and themes or, in other words, the abovementioned ‘maledettismo scapigliato’, but is multifaceted; 2) the Baudelairian material, which can derive from various sources and thematic areas, can be the starting point for Praga’s poetry, though it is generally reworked to sustain the poet’s personal poetic vision and message that eventually could, or could not, differ substantially from Baudelaire’s. Praga’s personal treatment of Baudelairian material in ‘Suicidio’ and ‘Per cominciare’ does not solely involve sombre elements but rather demonstrates an already profound interest for different aspects of Baudelaire’s poetic experience that would be deepened in *Penombre*. Certainly, throughout his poetry Praga keeps his distance from Baudelaire’s 1850s and 1860s aesthetic dandyism and anti-Romantic conception of nature as essentially evil. However, he draws heavily from such uplifting compositions as ‘Bénédiction’ and ‘Élévation’, as already seen, as well as more generally from Baudelaire’s Bohemianism and from what has been defined by F.W. Leakey as Baudelaire’s optimistic “‘cult” or “religion” of Nature”,<sup>57</sup> as chiefly exhibited in some poems of the 1840s such as ‘Bohémiens en voyage’, ‘Harmonie du

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<sup>57</sup> *Baudelaire and Nature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1969), p. 311.

soir', 'Paysage', and 'Correspondances'. Leakey clarifies his definition of Baudelaire as 'Nature-poet' thus:

[Baudelaire] could, for instance, find no place – except by contradiction – in any history of 'Nature-feeling' pure and simple. [...] more often than not, the natural scene is invoked for some ulterior imaginative purpose – as an 'elsewhere', a vague, dream-like antithesis to immediate reality, or, again, as a symbol or 'correspondence' for the poet's mood or ideas.<sup>58</sup>

Far from being a poet of nature in the wake of Hugo or Lamartine, Baudelaire subjectivises nature, and employs it aesthetically as a reflection of his own feelings or ideas – yet, nature does feature in his poetry, where it is often represented in a positive manner. It would have been certainly easy for Praga to consider Baudelaire a fellow pantheistic (and Romantic) poet who considers nature as the image of the divine,<sup>59</sup> supported by some statements written by Baudelaire himself,<sup>60</sup> and from a certain aspect he did; however, as we shall see, Praga also understood, if not completely, that Baudelaire was something unique compared to previous Romantics.

At first blush, it is certainly easy to classify Baudelaire's main influence on Praga, also in *Tavolozza*, merely in terms of a yearning for amoral or shocking realism, but this would mean to oversimplify the matter, with the risk of jumping to premature conclusions and overlooking important, if not pivotal, factors. For instance, similarly to 'Larve eleganti' and 'Nella tomba', the Baudelairian material in 'Suicidio' does not only relate to Praga's crude realism, but it deals with the inclusion of utterly imaginary elements, and the transfiguration of realistic images into fantastic ones. If in 'Nella tomba' the fantastic treatment of the subject matter

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 318.

<sup>59</sup> See Robb, p. 141.

<sup>60</sup> See the article on Hugo published in the anthology *Les Poètes français* in 1862: 'tout, forme, mouvement, nombre, couleur, parfum, dans le *spirituel* comme dans le *naturel*, est significatif, réciproque, converse, *correspondant*' (OC II, p. 133).

involves the idea of the poet who is dead and alive at the same time, and in ‘Larve eleganti’ the transformation of the characters within a memory into dancing ghosts, in ‘Suicidio’ it pertains to the closing image of the soul of the artist that leaves his mortal body, joins a pantheistic nature, and paints with sunbeams.

Praga’s Bohemianism was one of the first features of his poetry to be recognised by contemporary critics, more often than not in a moralistic and judgemental way, as the obituary that appeared in the journal *Il Fanfulla* in February 1876, signed with the pseudonym Nino, clearly demonstrates: ‘Si sa che [Praga] fu un *bohème*, un cinico, che cantò [...] il vino, l’orgia, e bestemmiò come un turco. [...] Praga fu il cantore degli amori venali e della vita da zingaro’.<sup>61</sup> This link between Bohemianism, Scapigliatura, and dissolute life was rather commonplace in late-nineteenth-century conservative criticism (and not only), but Praga’s conception of Bohemian life in *Tavolozza* is not limited to Nino’s notion of *bohème*, and topics such as vagabond life, revelry, and intoxication are not cynically nor negatively – but rather genuinely and fervently – depicted.

Praga’s interest in the Bohemian lifestyle is also evident in his critical writings. In his article about the 1865 annual art exhibition at the Pinacoteca di Brera, Praga enthusiastically reviews Alessandro Durini’s watercolour ‘La gioventù del pittore ed incisore Giacomo Callot’, which portrays the artist Jacques Callot intent on drawing a sketch of a young Gypsy girl, as follows: ‘chi non si è arrestato estatico davanti a quel giovane Callot, a quella leggiadrissima zingara di cui il divino artista ritrae le sembianze, in mezzo al bizzarro accampamento dei *bohémiens*

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<sup>61</sup> ‘Emilio Praga’, *Il Fanfulla*, 28 February 1876, repr. in *La pubblicistica nel periodo della Scapigliatura*, ed. by Giuseppe Farinelli, p. 290.

viaggiatori?’.<sup>62</sup> The elements of this last phrase, namely the French noun ‘*bohémiens*’ and the adjective ‘viaggiatori’, have been carefully chosen by Praga for a very specific reason. Immediately after this sentence, Praga cites the first stanza from Baudelaire’s sonnet ‘Bohémiens en voyage’:

*La tribu prophétique aux prunelles ardentes,  
Hier s’est mise en route, emportant ses petits,  
Sur son dos, en livrant à leurs fiers appétits  
Le trésor toujours prêt des mamelles pendantes.*<sup>63</sup>

Praga’s quotation is almost entirely accurate according to Baudelaire’s poem as appeared in the first and second editions of the *Fleurs* (OC I, p. 18), with the exception of the gerund phrase ‘*en livrant*’ that in the original is the slightly different ‘*ou livrant*’ (l. 3), and the commas after ‘*ardentes*’ and ‘*petits*’ that are not present in any version of the *Fleurs* (ll. 1-2), all of which suggests that Praga is here quoting from memory.

Baudelaire, whose ‘Bohémiens en voyage’ itself was another *ekphrasis* inspired by an etching by Callot<sup>64</sup> (and this was probably suspected by Praga, hence the quotation), appreciated the Bohemian lifestyle, as it is evident in the many poems that praise travelling and vagabond life, as well as in following excerpt from *Mon cœur mis à nu*: ‘Glorifier le vagabondage et ce qu’on peut appeler le Bohémianisme, culte de la sensation multipliée’ (OC I, p. 701). ‘Bohémiens en voyage’ happily celebrates the freedom that lies in Bohemianism and it is a very early poem, probably written in the years 1842-1843,<sup>65</sup> which attests to Baudelaire’s sympathy for the travellers who, despite being poor, benefit from the abundance that nature provides

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<sup>62</sup> ‘L’esposizione di Belle Arti’, *Il sole*, 22 September 1865, p. 9.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. (italic in the original).

<sup>64</sup> Pichois, p. 864.

<sup>65</sup> Robb, p. 387.

them, as ‘Cybèle, qui les aime, augmente ses verdure’ (l. 11) in a sort of modern Golden Age. Here, it is possible to notice the youthful faith in nature characteristic of some compositions of the 1840s: this poem ‘demonstrates that the admired harmony between Man and Nature [...] is still to be found, even within the Western world, among such ethological “sports” as the gypsies’.<sup>66</sup> These *bohémiens* are ‘les grands témoins d’une perdurance du modèle antique’ in Baudelaire’s poetry,<sup>67</sup> namely that linked to pantheism, primitivism, and paganism which was celebrated in much of early-nineteenth-century Romantic and post-Romantic poetry, such as in the works of Baudelaire’s contemporaries and friends Gautier and Banville. It is safe to say that in the Gypsies, as noted by Pichois, ‘Baudelaire découvre l’image de l’artiste méconnu, de l’artiste qui vit en marge de la société’<sup>68</sup> represented in ‘La Mort des artistes’ and ‘Bénédiction’ and, following Baudelaire, in Praga’s ‘Suicidio’ and ‘Per cominciare’. After all, ‘S’il [Baudelaire] apparaît à ses contemporains comme un dandy, il n’en a pas moins fréquenté, surtout de 1842 à 1846, les milieux de la bohème vraiment pauvre’.<sup>69</sup>

Baudelaire’s identification with Gypsies and Bohemians is part of a more general sympathy for the underdogs and the underprivileged, which emerges in many compositions of the *Fleurs*. Baudelaire’s Bohemianism as displayed in ‘Bohémiens en voyage’ and the other poems previously mentioned undoubtedly had a strong influence on Praga since *Tavolozza*, both in terms of content and artistic ideas, including the notion of the close connection between different arts such as, but not limited to, poetry and painting. As a matter of fact, in the article on ‘La gioventù del

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<sup>66</sup> Leakey, pp. 53-54.

<sup>67</sup> Labarthe, *Baudelaire et la tradition de l’allégorie*, p. 327.

<sup>68</sup> ‘Notices, notes et variantes’, p. 864.

<sup>69</sup> Robb, p. 128.



pittore ed incisore Giacomo Callot', immediately after Baudelaire's quotation, Praga states: 'Quando l'artista mi fa pensare a un poeta e i colori e le linee mi risuscitano nella memoria i versi e le strofe, le armi della critica mi si spuntano nelle mani'.<sup>70</sup> This suggests two significant things: firstly, that also in his criticism Praga treasured and promoted the close relationship between poetry and painting, and that Baudelaire is a key presence in this relationship; secondly, that Praga is probably citing 'Bohémiens en voyage' from memory ('mi risuscitano nella memoria i versi e le strofe'), also taking into account that, as seen above, he slightly misquotes Baudelaire's poem.

Baudelaire's influence on Praga as regards the link between different arts is not limited to the supposed, and entirely theoretical, conception of the correlation between poetry and painting, as explained in his critical writing, or the actual poetic techniques employed to depict images in a pictorial fashion, as in 'Suicidio'. Praga also experimented with the combination of diverse sensory characteristics, attempting to set down images verbally based on the interaction between the senses and, simultaneously, between different arts, following a synaesthetic process that, at the time of *Tavolozza*, is circumscribed to few yet central sections of compositions that derive from a specific Baudelairian practice. 'Il poeta ubbriaco' is a celebration of cheerful Bohemianism that involves music, singing, dancing, the inspirational power of inebriation and, most importantly, what Arthur Rimbaud would later define, in the so-called 'Lettre du voyant', as the '*dérèglement de tous les sens*' in order to create poetry.<sup>71</sup> Setting aside the common early-nineteenth-century trope of intoxicating debauchery, the more profound sources of 'Il poeta ubbriaco' can be

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<sup>70</sup> 'L'esposizione di Belle Arti', p. 9.

<sup>71</sup> *Œuvres Complètes*, ed. by André Guyaux, p. 344.

found in Baudelaire's 'Harmonie du soir' and, more generally, in the (nature-focused) synaesthetic ideas exposed in 'Correspondances', as well as in the Bohemian atmosphere of the section of the *Fleurs* titled 'Le Vin'.

'Harmonie du soir' was certainly one of the poems preferred by Praga, and it has been constantly referenced, both implicitly and explicitly, in his private and public writings. The most straightforward borrowing, though only in title, is arguably in *Penombre*, which features 'Armonie della sera' (PP, pp. 197-198), but precise quotations and looser allusions to 'Harmonie du soir' can be found throughout Praga's work. The impressionistic and very much pictorial verse '*Le soleil s'est noyé dans son sang qui se fige*' would be passionately quoted by Praga, alongside a slightly modified and again very pictorial line from 'Causerie', that is to say '*Comme un beau ciel d'automne clair et rose*' (italics in the original),<sup>72</sup> in his reply to Boito's missive announcing Baudelaire's death, already seen in the Introduction.<sup>73</sup> The importance of 'Harmonie du soir' for Praga's poetic modernity and maturity shall be progressively unravelled in this study.

## **1.7 Music, Synaesthesia, and Intoxicating Visions: Investigating 'Il poeta ubbriaco' and 'Orgia'**

The harmony represented in 'Harmonie du soir' is that of scents of flowers and music played by a violin, which combine to create a multi-sensory waltz that comprises the recurring and dance-like tunes of instrumental music, and the various

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<sup>72</sup> The actual verse of 'Causerie' is the following: 'Vous êtes un beau ciel d'automne, clair et rose' (OC I, p. 56, l. 1)

<sup>73</sup> Quoted by Nardi, *Vita di Arrigo Boito*, p. 350.

natural fragrances. In ‘Harmonie du soir’, it is quite clear why Baudelaire has been defined as ‘le plus grand poète olfactif de la littérature française’:<sup>74</sup>

Voici venir les temps où vibrant sur sa tige  
Chaque fleur s'évapore ainsi qu'un encensoir;  
Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir;  
Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige!

Chaque fleur s'évapore ainsi qu'un encensoir;  
Le violon frémit comme un cœur qu'on afflige;  
Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige!  
Le ciel est triste et beau comme un grand reposoir. (OC I, p. 47, ll. 1-8)

The repetitive and dual ‘harmonie’ that is both olfactory and musical is rendered poetically with an irregular yet symmetrical *pantoum* form, where the second and fourth lines of a stanza are consistently employed as the first and third of the succeeding one, and the only two rhymes utilised are ‘-ige’ and ‘-oir’. Moreover, the terminology follows the formal structure in its circularity, with words such as ‘tournent’, ‘Valse’, and ‘vertige’ that verbally translate the constant recurrence, and continuous spinning, of music and scents.<sup>75</sup> As Leakey suggests, sounds and fragrances seem to be dancing a waltz themselves:

the main concern [...] is with the imagined *fusion* of these scents and sounds, in a ‘dance’ that is not merely pictured for us [...], but can be *heard* also in the lilt – assuming almost, at times, the slow yet strongly accented rhythms of the ‘melancholy waltz’ itself – of certain metrical phrases.<sup>76</sup>

The fusion of natural fragrances, particularly flowers, and music, or better the use of poetry as a vehicle to express this fusion, is the objective of ‘Il poeta ubbriaco’ (PP, pp. 46-48). For the most part, the poem has been labelled as an example of Praga’s interest for *maudit* themes such as intoxication and feminine sensuality at the

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<sup>74</sup> Pichois, p. 846.

<sup>75</sup> For an analysis of Baudelaire’s (contrasting) idea of translating music into writing, see Dayan, pp. 32-36.

<sup>76</sup> *Baudelaire and Nature*, p. 83.

time of *Tavolozza* or, in an analogous way to ‘Orgia’ (part of the same collection), as a poem essentially about the role of joyous vinous inebriation in poetic inspiration.<sup>77</sup> ‘Il poeta ubbriaco’ is unquestionably about all that, but at the same time it distances itself from ‘Orgia’, since the Baudelairian elements present in the former, which cannot be simply defined in terms of ‘maledettismo’, make ‘Il poeta ubbriaco’ a much more interesting, and definitely more unusual, composition. The ‘drunken poet’ of the title strives to record in poetry what his deranged (and hyper-excited) senses see, hear, and smell:

Datemi un nappo, datemi dei versi;  
le imposte aprite, entrino i venti e il sole:  
quanti fantasmi nel cervel dispersi!  
Che musica di forme, e di parole!

Sento un odor di grandine e di rose,  
e il vo’ scrivere in versi alessandrini:  
Come fanciulle flebili e amorose  
Cantin le cetre dai sonori crini. (ll. 1-8)

This ‘musica di forme, e di parole’ is a combination of natural scents, sounds, rhythms, and dances that the poet attempts to represent, or better to translate, verbally (‘il vo’ scrivere’) and vocally (‘cantin le cetre’), in an all-encompassing poetic form that can convey smells (‘odor’, ‘imbalsamate’ [l. 17], ‘fragranze’ [l. 18]), sounds and music (‘musica’, ‘cantin’, ‘cetre’, ‘sonori’, ‘nota’ [l. 16], ‘flebile’, ‘sonora’, ‘cadenze’ [l. 17]), and images of dance (‘dando il braccio’ [l. 9], ‘danzatemi’ [l. 12], ‘balletto’ [l. 15], and so forth). Particularly, there is an attempt to unite floral fragrances with the musical rhythm of dance, thus recalling Baudelaire’s ‘Harmonie du soir’ in which the smell of flowers that ‘s’évapor[ent] ainsi qu’un encensoir’ fills the air, and ‘Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l’air du soir; / Valse mélancolique

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<sup>77</sup> See Petrucciani, pp. 58, 61 note 26; Nutini, ‘Sotto “il velo del quietismo”’, p. 94.

et langoureux vertige!': 'Volete le cadenze imbalsamate / di fragranze di rosa e gelsomino' (ll. 17-18).

The idea that a musical rhythm can synaesthetically express a natural fragrance, and that it is the ultimate duty of the poet to set down verbally this association of the senses, surely derives from Baudelaire's analogical theory as explained in the sonnet 'Correspondances' (OC I, p. 11). There, a friendly 'Nature' is 'un temple où de vivants piliers / Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles' (ll. 1-2), and the barrier between human sensory perceptions is no more: 'Les parfums, les couleurs et le sons se répondent' (l. 8). If in 'Il poeta ubbriaco' Praga represents verbal (and vocal) music that strives to convey, in its rhythmical lilt, natural scents, in 'Correspondances' Baudelaire had already made natural scents sing with a human voice, following a synaesthetic practice that would influence many writers in late-nineteenth-century European literature: 'Il est des parfums [...] Qui chantent les transports de l'esprit et des sens' (ll. 9, 14). Amongst Baudelaire's other poems promoting the fusion of different sensory elements, especially natural fragrances and sounds, most notable is 'Parfum exotique' where, in a similar way to 'Il poeta ubbriaco', the charming perfume of plants and vocal music (the song of the sailors, which regularly appears also in *Tavolozza*) are merged: 'le parfum des verts tamariniers, / Qui circule dans l'air et m'enfle la narine, / Se mêle dans mon âme au chant des marinières' (OC I, p. 26, ll. 12-14). Beside some important examples of cross-sensory analogy, such as in 'Correspondances', Baudelaire's synaesthesia relies more on the intermingling of separate images conveying different senses, such as in 'Parfum exotique' and 'Harmonie du soir', rather than on what can be deemed as semantic or literary synaesthesia, unlike other post-Romantic poets such as

Rimbaud who, starting from Baudelairean ideas, approached literary synaesthesia in a more systematic manner, making it the very essence of his poetry.<sup>78</sup> However, Baudelaire's approach to both synaesthesia employed as a rhetorical device and the association of different sensory features would constitute a significant influence on Praga, especially in *Penombre*, by means of which he would truly experiment with important factors of Baudelaire's modernity, as we shall see below in Chapter II.2.5.

In 'Il poeta ubbriaco', Praga also takes up the dynamic image of the continuous spinning of the Baudelairean waltz, turning the figurative dance of 'Harmonie du soir' into the physical act of people rotating at a musical rhythm: 'turbine' (l. 19); 'Volete in giro rotear sul prato' (l. 37); 'ridda'; 'Roteamo' (ll. 60-61). This concretisation of metaphorical or allegorical images featuring in 'Harmonie du soir' can be found throughout 'Il poeta ubbriaco', in particular in the first five stanzas, where Praga adapts the Baudelairean material – in terms of vocabulary, analogies, or entire images – to his own more realistic poetic vision. For instance, Baudelaire writes that 'Le violon frémit comme un cœur qu'on afflige', and Praga employs an analogous simile that entails the association of the sound of a musical instrument with the lamenting voice of a human being: 'Come fanciulle flebili e amorose / Cantin le cetre dai sonori crini'. Praga converts the metaphorical image of the heart that moans into the more tangible and joyful, yet still lamenting ('flebili'), voices of young girls in love, and although he uses the noun 'cetre' primarily as a symbol of melodious and cantabile poetry, the direct reference to the musical properties of the antique cithara is indisputable. Praga represents citharas that sing:

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<sup>78</sup> For an examination of Rimbaud's synaesthesia, interrelation between the arts, and intoxication, see Alessandro Cabiati, 'Fabulous Operas, Rock'n'Roll Shows: The Intoxication and Poetic Experimentation of Arthur Rimbaud and Jim Morrison', in *Literature and Intoxication: Writing, Politics and the Experience of Excess*, ed. by Eugene Brennan and Russell Williams (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 97-107.

after all, Baudelaire gives a human singing (but also crying or lamenting) voice to musical instruments, or to other non-human figures, in several compositions, as Helen Abbott has demonstrated,<sup>79</sup> such as in ‘L’Amour du mensonge’ where Baudelaire writes about the ‘chant des instruments’ (OC I, p. 98, l. 2), or the ‘chant des violons’ of ‘Danse macabre’ (OC I, p. 97, l. 25), or even the ‘carillons qui chantent’, in ‘La Cloche fêlée’ (OC I, p. 71, l. 4). In Baudelaire, therefore, poetry ‘becomes idealised as a “chant-instrument”, different from vocal music, different from instrumental music, different from music altogether, and yet still beholden to it’.<sup>80</sup> ‘Il poeta ubbriaco’ is not the only poem in which, with precise references to Baudelaire, the lamenting sound of a musical instrument is compared to the singing, or more generally to the voice, of a human being: see, for instance, from *Penombre*, the ‘note di cembalo / che canta, o stride, o geme’, in ‘Nox’ (PP, p. 128, ll. 61-62); the ‘contrabbassi’ that moan sadly ‘quasi vecchioni affannati a seguire / giovani passi’, in ‘La festa e l’alcova’ (PP, p. 123, ll. 62-64); or ‘Cantavan nell’ampie caserme i tamburi’, in ‘Armonie della sera’ (PP, p. 197, l. 9).

As early as ‘Il poeta ubbriaco’, Praga demonstrated an active interest in Baudelaire’s theory of analogical correspondences and practice of cross-sensory analogy, which strives to convey multi-sensory impressions and sensations, namely the ‘transports de l’esprit et des sens’, in poetry. In Praga’s poem, however, the proposition of turning natural scents into a musical poem is not met with a proper aesthetic application of this concept, and the peculiar intention of verbally unifying perfumes and music by means of the poetic word remains, ultimately, only theoretical, hence appearing, compared to the rest of the poem, simply as the

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<sup>79</sup> *Between Baudelaire and Mallarmé: Voice, Conversation and Music* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p. 191, Table 6.1.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

occasional drunken statement of a deranged poet. The source of the musicality of ‘Il poeta ubbriaco’ is, by the speaker’s admission, words and representations of dancing figures (‘Che musica di forme, e di parole!’) – nonetheless, words are employed to describe, in a very visual fashion, songs and dances that already exist in the world (for example, ‘Volete il canto che intuonò Maometto’, PP, p. 47, l. 25), rather than to create verbal music themselves, that is to say, rather than words becoming music to the ear of the reader/listener/performer. Baudelaire’s choice of a harmony composed primarily of scents and *instrumental* music (yet linked to the human voice) and Praga’s that instead chiefly involves fragrances and *vocal* music (yet associated with instruments) entails a subtle but pivotal difference. Praga’s poetic word is, at this stage, linked more to the idea of mimetic representation rather than symbolic interpretation, and even when, following Baudelaire, his language aims to set down different sensory characteristics or subjective impressions and sensations, it is still burdened with a precise imitational objective. As Abbott writes, ‘Since vocal music or song would traditionally remain beholden to words – and therefore to meaning – Baudelaire [...] begin[s] to explore a poetic song that is devoid of over-laden semantics’,<sup>81</sup> and Praga’s focus on vocal song instead of instrumental, and his concretisation of Baudelaire’s figurative language, means that his approach precludes the suggestive musicality of a poem like ‘Harmonie du soir’, despite a similar use of refrains and repetitions, and its general songlike features. Baudelaire’s ‘Harmonie du soir’ evokes, rather than depicts, images that are only loosely connected by the feelings of the poet, hence creating an utterly subjective and non-mimetic atmosphere that supports, and does not impede, the combination of scents and

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<sup>81</sup> *Between Baudelaire and Mallarmé*, pp. 191-192.



instrumental music through the poetic medium. As Baudelaire himself wrote in a letter to Alphonse Toussenel on 21 January 1856, it is the poet who has to interpret and poetically set down the symbolic language of nature, with its various sensory characteristics, by means of the imagination and figures of speech: '*l'imagination est la plus scientifique des facultés, parce que seule elle comprend l'analogie universelle, ou ce qu'une religion mystique appelle la correspondance*' (Corr. I, p. 336).

Notwithstanding, in 'Il poeta ubbriaco' Praga takes up Baudelaire's sense of sensual languor conveyed by the dance, once again concretised in a physical and more straightforward image. In 'Harmonie du soir', Baudelaire's dance is a 'Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige!' that triggers a joyful memory of the past concerning a mistress ('Ton souvenir en moi luit comme un ostensor!' [OC I, p. 47, l. 16]) – after all, 'Harmonie du soir' is part of the cycle of love poems dedicated to Mme Sabatier. As Robb affirms, 'Même quand il évoque des moments heureux, c'est rarement la poésie elle-même qui laisse entrevoir le paradis; ce pouvoir est attribué aux odeurs, aux souvenirs, aux désirs érotiques',<sup>82</sup> and this is exactly what happens with the atmosphere of mystical voluptuousness of 'Harmonie du soir', in which the 'souvenir' of the lover is expressed through a religious vocabulary ('encensoir'; 'reposoir'; 'ostensor'). Fundamentally, Praga transforms Baudelaire's '*langoureux vertige*' (my italic) into a veritable erotic (yet still languid) dance of lovers, more similar in its sensuality to the atmosphere of other poems by Baudelaire such as 'Le Serpent qui danse' or 'Le Beau navire': 'dando il braccio a sedicenni amanti, / pallide di *languore* e di piacere' (PP, p. 46, ll. 9-10, my italic).

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<sup>82</sup> *La Poésie de Baudelaire*, pp. 40-41.

In fact, the repetition scheme of the first three stanzas of ‘Il poeta ubbriaco’ signals a structural proximity to ‘Le Beau navire’ (OC I, pp. 51-52), in which the representation of the sensuality of the mistress, who moves her body as if she were dancing, is musically expressed through the single repetition of three whole four-line stanzas. In this composition, the first three stanzas return, without modification, as respectively the fourth, seventh, and tenth stanza. Similarly, even if he does not follow the pattern as rigorously as Baudelaire, in ‘Il poeta ubbriaco’ Praga employs the first three stanzas twice: the first two quatrains recur, with slightly modified punctuation, as the thirteenth and the eighth stanza respectively; the third quatrain returns with more substantial changes as the fourteenth stanza, and the rhyme in ‘ere’ of the second and fourth lines is retained in order to keep the same musicality. A similar repetition pattern is used in the other poem of *Tavolozza* depicting the sensuality of the dancers and wine intoxication, ‘Orgia’ (PP, pp. 53-55), which bears close relation to ‘Il poeta ubbriaco’, including the recurrence of entire stanzas: the first quatrain returns as the sixth, and the second as the ninth. On a more general note, it seems to me that the specific function of repetition in Baudelaire’s poetic work, which is employed ‘as a structuring device which is reminiscent of poetry’s originary heritage as song’,<sup>83</sup> truly influenced Praga’s poetry since *Tavolozza*, together with its significant presence in the *Fleurs*, where it takes the form of the systematic recurrence of single words, phrases, lines, refrains, or even entire stanzas, depending on the poem.

Most curious is the poet’s statement, in the second stanza of ‘Il poeta ubbriaco’ cited above, about writing ‘in versi alessandrini’. The alexandrine that

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<sup>83</sup> Abbott, p. 213.

Praga chooses is not an Italian alexandrine, which is to say a compound verse formed by two distinctive *settenari*. Contrarily, Praga describes as ‘alessandrini’ verses that for the Italian metrical rules would simply be *endecasillabi*, but the repetitions and the frequent mid-line caesura mainly marked by commas, conjunctions, or prepositions provide them with a musical lilt similar to that of the traditional French alexandrine. I would argue that, by declaring his verses as alexandrines, Praga makes a further reference to ‘Harmonie du soir’, in this occasion to its metrical scheme, while simultaneously showing some sort of indebtedness to the dominant metre of the *Fleurs du Mal* and, indeed, one of the dominant metres of French poetry.

The two ending stanzas of ‘Il poeta ubbriaco’ explicitly announce the social, inspirational, and imaginative power of wine:

L’anima è un mar di note onnipossenti,  
e sotto i baci del licor di Chio,  
forti ho le braccia, e l’ali al cor potenti!  
Dite, entrar posso nella ridda anch’io?

Roteamo, cantiam, bimbe, giganti!  
E d’amore e di vin qui scorra un fiume;  
versi, aria, luce, fior nei crini erranti,  
io brucio, e sento che divento un Nume! (PP, p. 48, ll. 57-64)

These last two quatrains contain many thematic elements disseminated throughout the five poems that compose the section of the *Fleurs* titled ‘Le Vin’ (OC I, pp. 105-110), which illustrates the solace, pleasure, and creativity associated with wine drinking. This cycle is dedicated to the joyful role of wine intoxication in the ordinary life of the unfortunate and those belonging to the lower classes, all of whom seem to be impersonations, or disguises, of the poet himself. After all, the following characters of ‘Le Vin’ either speak directly in the first-person singular as the lyrical I or are associated with the role of the poet creating poetry: the everyday man that

produces and drinks his own wine ('L'Âme du vin'); the inebriated rag-picker ('Le Vin des chiffonniers'); the murderer who killed his wife and is looking for oblivion ('Le Vin de l'assassin'); the solitary man who prefers drinking to anything else ('Le Vin du solitaire'); the lovers who seek dreams and artificial paradises ('Le Vin des amants').

The first element to be analysed is the function of the act of singing in relation to wine. This is a rather common topic in the representation of Dionysian intoxicating frenzy, particularly in early- and mid-nineteenth century;<sup>84</sup> yet, in Praga and Baudelaire it is treated in a very peculiar, and somewhat similar, fashion. In 'Le Vin', the singing is left mostly to the personification of the wine, or better to the 'soul of the wine', which in the poem 'L'Âme du vin' quite uncommonly 'chantait dans les bouteilles [...] Un chant plein de lumière et de fraternité!' (OC I, p. 105, ll. 1, 4) as well as singing 'les refrains des dimanches' (l. 13), in order to inspire the intoxicated poet ('Pour que de notre amour naisse la poésie', l. 23); or directly makes the drunk human being sing about wine: 'Par le gosier de l'homme il [le vin] chante ses exploits' ('Le Vin des chiffonniers', OC I, p. 106, l. 27). Surely, in 'Il poeta ubbriaco' it is the soul of the inebriated poet that is 'un mar di note onniposenti' and sings about wine drinking, and not the soul of the wine itself; however, in 'Orgia', following 'L'Âme du vin', Praga specifies that it is exactly the 'soul of the wine' that inspires the poet and makes him sing (and dance): 'spumeggi in cor coll'ispirato vino / la musa brilla! | [...] nei colmi nappi un'anima s'asconde; [...] cantiam, cantiam' (PP, pp. 53-54, ll. 3-4, 6, 11). The singing and musical properties of the 'soul of the

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<sup>84</sup> To name only one author, see Théodore de Banville's 'Chanson à boire' and 'La Chanson du vin' from *Les Stalactites* (1846), which have many elements in common with Praga's and Baudelaire's representations of singing and cheerful intoxication ('La Chanson du vin' also bears a quotation from Baudelaire's 'L'Âme du vin'). *Œuvres poétiques complètes*, 7 vols, ed. by Peter J. Edwards (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1996), II, 14-16, 25-29.

wine' would also be mentioned in a poem of *Penombre*, which takes the cue of anthropomorphism of the wine, and the entire title, from 'L'Âme du vin', namely 'L'anima del vino' (PP, pp. 132-134).

The close relationship between poetic creativity and wine is an essential element of Baudelaire's 'Le Vin' and Praga's 'Il poeta ubbriaco' and 'Orgia'. In the two poets, the inspirational and cheerful characteristics of wine drinking are often coupled with other (supposed) benefits of wine intoxication, such as love towards other human beings and an enhanced capacity of relating and bonding with them. In 'Il poeta ubbriaco' (but also in 'Orgia' and *Penombre*'s 'L'anima del vino'), Praga constantly associates the social function of wine with that of human love ('E d'amore e di vin qui scorra un fiume'), insofar as the latter is nurtured by wine, and the two seem to be indissolubly linked. Furthermore, Praga portrays a dynamic festive environment full of people, characterised by the uplifting presence of natural elements such as 'venti', 'sole', 'aria', 'luce', 'fior'. Also in 'Le Vin' the notion of intoxication is never far away from that of love and bonding, or from that of nature.<sup>85</sup> the song of 'L'Âme du vin' is 'plein de lumière et de fraternité' (OC I, p. 105, l. 4), and poetry is born out of the 'amour' between wine and human beings; the inebriated rag-picker 'Épanche tout son cœur en glorieux projets' and 'relève les victimes' (OC I, p. 106, ll. 8, 10), since wine is able to 'noyer la rancœur' (OC I, p. 107, l. 29). Particularly, the following excerpt from 'Le Vin des chiffonniers' promotes the societal role of wine intoxication, and illustrates an animated orgy of people, natural light, scents, flowers, songs, music and, above all, love not dissimilar to that of 'Il poeta ubbriaco':

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<sup>85</sup> As Robb, p. 140, affirms, the author of 'L'Âme du vin' 'aurait pu lui-même être taxé de panthéisme'.

Oui, ces gens harcelés de chagrins de ménage,  
[...]

Reviennent, parfumés d'une odeur de futailles,  
Suivis de compagnons, blanchis dans les batailles,  
Dont la moustache pend comme les vieux drapeaux.  
Les bannières, les fleurs et les arcs triomphaux

Se dressent devant eux, solennelle magie!  
Et dans l'étourdissante et lumineuse orgie  
Des clairons, du soleil, des cris et du tambour,  
Ils apportent la gloire au peuple ivre d'amour! (OC I, p. 106, ll. 13, 17-24)

This will to depict – and to defend – the lives of the underdogs, their sentiments of fraternity, and their attempts to enjoy life and drunkenness despite their problems, mistakes, and social status, is featured especially in some of the poems that Baudelaire wrote in the years around the French 1848 revolution, hence before Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte's coup d'état occurred in 1851, which left Baudelaire politically disillusioned and, as he affirmed in a letter written in March 1852, '*physiquement dépolitiqué*' (Corr. I, p. 188). These compositions convey what Baudelaire defined, while speaking about his poem 'La Rançon', as 'socialisme mitigé' (OC I, p. 1158). Baudelaire's Socialist feelings, probably better defined as 'socialisme humanitariste' or 'socialisme chrétien',<sup>86</sup> were interpreted by Anatole France and Marcel Proust as 'le témoignage d'un poète du peuple',<sup>87</sup> and were a result of Baudelaire's personal and intellectual camaraderie with the Bohemian and Realist cenacle close to Courbet and Champfleury. Baudelaire's realism has often been considered, particularly by his contemporaries, as simply the celebration of *maudit* themes such as the macabre representation of 'Une charogne'; the eroticism of the condemned poems; the blasphemous and anti-Catholic litanies; or the vulgar

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<sup>86</sup> Pichois, p. 1158.

<sup>87</sup> Compagnon, p. 12.

portrayal of intoxicated states – similar, in this case, to what has been repeatedly described as ‘maledettismo’ or ‘realismo’ of Scapigliatura. Baudelaire’s realism is, however, not limited to this. As Compagnon writes, ‘Baudelaire réaliste, c’est ainsi non seulement Baudelaire érotique ou baroque, suivant les confusions du tribunal et du collège, mais encore Baudelaire socialiste, animé de soucis humanitaires et d’un optimisme fraternel’.<sup>88</sup> It is difficult to believe that this aspect of Baudelaire’s poetry would not influence Praga, particularly the optimistic collection *Tavolozza*, where drunkenness is considered as a dynamic force employed to celebrate (and to improve) life and to derange the senses in order to inspire poetic creation, and not as a mere passive medium for drowning sorrowfulness and reaching unconsciousness, as it would be in most of the poems of *Penombre*. Certainly, the soothing benefits of wine, drunk in order to find alcoholic oblivion, are present also in Baudelaire – see ‘Le Vin de l’assassin’ – but it is the active and empowering function of wine that is primarily, and truly, celebrated in the section ‘Le Vin’. Praga’s later depiction of drunkenness in *Penombre* would be part of a broader change of direction in his choice, and subsequent treatment, of Baudelairian material. If, on the one hand, Praga’s social realism and aesthetic interests in ill-fated aspects of life would lead him to use precise references (and occasionally identical images) to Baudelaire’s most Socialist, and city-related, poems, on the other this very contemplation of the unfortunate realities of modern life would entail a focus on darker themes and other aspects of Baudelaire’s ‘socialisme mitigé’, such as the grotesque depictions of, and simultaneous compassion for, the suffering inhabitants of ‘l’immonde cité’ (‘Mœsta et errabunda’, OC I, p. 63, l. 2).

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

In both ‘Le Vin’ and in the wine poems of *Tavolozza* the invigorating power of wine, physical *and* emotional, is expressively proclaimed: compare, for instance, Praga’s ‘sotto i baci del licor di Chio, / forti ho le braccia, e l’ali al cor potenti!’ of ‘Il poeta ubbriaco’, and Baudelaire’s ‘À ton fils je [le vin] rendrai sa force et ses couleurs / Et serai pour ce frêle athlète de la vie / L’huile qui raffermir les muscles des lutteurs’, in ‘L’Âme du vin’ (OC I, p. 105, ll. 18-20). This empowering characteristic entails ecstatic feelings of all-encompassing happiness and omnipotence, symbolised by images of (‘Élévation’-like) flight towards the sky and transformation into God-like creatures. Praga compares the state of intoxication to an ascensional movement, to having ‘powerful wings to the heart’, and concludes his ode to wine with the transcendent image of the mythical transfiguration of the poet into a divine being, namely ‘io brucio, e sento che divento un Nume!’. Likewise, in ‘Le Vin du solitaire’ the metamorphosis into gods appears to be a natural step in the process of inebriation of the ‘poète pieux’: ‘Tu [la bouteille profonde] lui verses l’espoir, la jeunesse et la vie, / – Et l’orgueil, ce trésor de toute gueuserie, / Qui nous rend triomphants et semblables aux Dieux!’ (OC I, p. 109, ll. 11-14).<sup>89</sup> In ‘Le Vin des amants’ (OC I, pp. 109-110), conceptions of imaginary ascension, the self-induced paradisiac state, and the transcendental transformation into a divine creature draw together, becoming one single figurative representation of the intoxication of two lovers: ‘Partons à cheval sur le vin / Pour un ciel féerique et divin!’ (ll. 3-4); ‘Comme deux anges’ (l. 5); ‘Suivons le mirage lointain’ (l. 8); ‘Mollement balancés sur l’aile’ (l. 9); ‘Vers le paradis de mes rêves’ (l. 14).

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<sup>89</sup> As we have previously seen in Chapter I.2.3 on Boito’s *Re Orso*, this very passage also influenced the description of the Satanic and Faustian *apotheosis* strived for by *Re Orso* through the medium of wine.



The idea of the ‘fantastical’, of the imaginary world full of ‘mirage’ and ‘dreams’ reachable by means of the derangement of the senses is not absent in ‘Il poeta ubbriaco’ but, in a similar way to the musical and synaesthetic features already seen, it is integrated into a more concrete and objective (namely less figurative and symbolic) poetic vision. The speaker demands apparitions and hallucinations of fantastical creatures from his wine intoxication, such as ‘cyclops’ and ‘giants’ that would join him in a supernatural dance, a ‘mistico balletto’ (PP, p. 47, ll. 11-16). It is certainly true that, as Mariani states, in ‘Il poeta ubbriaco’ Praga’s ‘vocazione realistica’ harmonically combines with the fantastical one, which is still less noticeable than the former, but I do not think, following Mariani, that the features belonging to fantasy, myth, and exoticism are merely useless ‘elemento di alternanza, soluzione di ricambio’ to overused realistic descriptions.<sup>90</sup> In ‘Il poeta ubbriaco’, the fantastical component has a specific, and fundamental, role in the composition: together with the synaesthetic and musical elements, it stresses the inspirational power of wine used to generate deranged poetic creativeness in order for the poet to transcend his physical state and transform into ‘un Nume’, and it serves as starting point for the depiction of already existing songs and dances that, conversely, rely primarily on mimetic data. Praga’s aesthetic portrayal of wine inspiration, which expresses a delirious yet still realistic atmosphere, is ultimately different from Baudelaire’s ‘Le Vin des amants’, since this latter focuses on utter escapism, evoking a dream-like, otherworldly, and absolute figurative setting that is, in actuality, an altered state of consciousness triggered by wine.

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<sup>90</sup> *Storia della Scapigliatura*, p. 243.

In this section, we have seen that, in spite of still being generally considered an example of Praga's early poetic stage sharing very little with Baudelaire's poetry, *Tavolozza* can in fact be considered, in many aspects, a sort of experimentation with Baudelairean subjects, which only in part coincides with topics that can be defined as 'maledettismo scapigliato'. These subjects incorporate positive and edifying elements that belong to disparate thematic areas, including those commonly conceived as alien to Baudelaire (or even unequivocally anti-Baudelairean), such as the positive representation of the natural world, the hopeful expectancy of a religious afterlife, or the honest depiction of a better life for the poor and the underdog, the use of which would not be interrupted in *Penombre*, but only diminished. It has also been shown that in *Tavolozza* the Baudelairean cue, which is certainly less evident than in *Penombre*, is almost exclusively adapted to Praga's personal poetic vision. In the next section, from a general examination of the current scholarship on *Penombre*, which involves a central focus on key aspects of Scapigliatura's poetry, we shall approach the investigation of features of Baudelaire's influence on *Penombre* that have largely been overlooked, such as the idyllic characteristics of the collection, before moving on to the analogical representation of nature and the search for a subjective idea of beauty, in order to fully investigate Praga's Baudelaireism situated between the continuity of established tradition and a yearning for modernity.

## 2. *Praga's Multidimensional Baudelairism in 'Penombre'*

### 2.1 In the Shadow of Baudelaire: Reviews of *Penombre*

Unlike *Tavolozza*, which has predominantly been considered as loosely (and very partially) influenced by the *Fleurs*, recent scholars are agreed on the crucial impact that the latter had on the process of composition of *Penombre*. Scholars also agree on the overall assessment of this impact. As we shall see in this brief critical survey, the general impression is that, despite the apparent profundity of Baudelaire's influence, in *Penombre* Praga did not comprehend entirely and re-elaborate personally the complexity and novelty of Baudelaire's poetic world, particularly due to his own artistic limits and the backwardness of the Italian literary situation in mid-nineteenth century. At most, Praga succeeded in extrapolating individual elements from the *Fleurs* in terms of motifs, images, expressions, and poetic forms, matching the depth of the Baudelairian poetic experience only in sporadic instances. However, scholars tend to have different opinions regarding the aesthetic and extra-aesthetic significance in *Penombre* of those elements that Praga undoubtedly drew from Baudelaire, as well as the extent to which those instances in Praga's poetry go beyond mere textual reference, and the most subtle and unique Baudelairian characteristics are adapted to the poet's subjective sensibility.

As previously claimed in Chapter II.1.2, according to scholarship the most obvious feature of this influence is the 'maledettismo' that, as displayed especially in *Penombre* and more partially in *Tavolozza*, has long been considered Praga's literary and polemical tool for experimenting with new poetic material and rebelliously *épater* the average bourgeois reader. While recognising the prominence of the

Baudelairian influence on *Penombre*, and the consequent importance of this latter collection in the early development of a Decadent sensibility in Italy, Binni asserts that Praga's Baudelairism, in fact, remains at the surface: 'Baudelaire è sentito al solito in maniera provinciale, in maniera pesante e contenutistica'. This influence became part of Praga's 'voglia di disordine, di perversione, di maledettismo così poco intimo'; only very rarely does his Baudelairism convey 'illuminazioni di novità', that is to say, figures of speech related to the transposition of sensory impressions.<sup>91</sup> For the most part, this view is shared by Petrucciani, who sees the rare passages in *Penombre* that suggest a profound and insightful Baudelairism as examples of germinal Decadence. According to Petrucciani, for Praga the most appealing characteristic of the *Fleurs* was the novelty of *maudit* themes: Praga's reading of Baudelaire at the time of *Penombre* was 'condotta a preferenza sul registro "maledetto", assunto a strumento di novità';<sup>92</sup> primarily, Praga 'ricalca in *Penombre* certe più vistose deformazioni delle *Fleurs*'.<sup>93</sup> Beside this predominant superficial interpretation of Baudelaire's poetry, Praga draws from the *Fleurs*, though inconstantly and in a limited fashion, the techniques of analysis of the self and of surreal and fantastic association. In *Penombre*, Petrucciani continues, Praga discovers a new direction, 'l'autobiografia decadentisticamente intesa: senso di stanchezza, e d'angoscia, prostrazione fisica, un malessere insomma, o noia, o inquietudine', which would be explored more thoroughly only in Praga's last collection of poetry, *Trasparenze*. Petrucciani further notes that this thematic does

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<sup>91</sup> *La poetica del decadentismo*, pp. 67-68.

<sup>92</sup> *Emilio Praga*, p. 34.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

not belong to Scapigliatura – it is part of a more modern Decadent poetics, for ‘s’innesta agli albori del decadentismo italiano’.<sup>94</sup>

Nardi and Mariani have slightly different opinions to Binni and Petrucciani, focusing less on Praga’s scandalous realism and more on other characteristics of his Baudelairism. Nardi initially discusses, briefly, the most evident features of Baudelaire’s influence on *Penombre*, including the poetic praise of prostitutes, vice, intoxicants, and blasphemy, as well as the formal (and musical) use of the *strophe encadrée*, where the first line of a stanza recurs as the last line of the very same stanza, occasionally slightly modified.<sup>95</sup> Nardi then shifts focus from the specific ‘maledettismo’ just described to a general Baudelairism related to solipsistic and introverted self-scrutiny, characterised by feelings of sorrow and anguish, which Nardi defines as a ‘malattia spirituale’ chiefly caused by Praga’s reading of the *Fleurs* and by his friendship with Boito. Nardi asserts that Baudelaire’s poetry, in spite of its ‘idealismo estremo’ and individualism, represents a novelty compared to previous Romantic works because of its detachment from a self-pitying and pathetic stance.<sup>96</sup> Contrarily, Praga’s own poetic development, which also entails a focus on the poet’s own inner experience, is not a step forward but backwards, a Romantic involution and not an evolution which, even if it anticipates original techniques largely employed by the Italian *Futuristi* and *Crepuscolari* at the beginning of the twentieth century, does not relate to Baudelaire’s unwavering poetic (and moral) impassivity.<sup>97</sup> Mariani’s interpretation does not differ much from Nardi’s, apart from the very significant use of the term ‘Decadent’, instead of Nardi’s ‘Romantic’, to

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., pp. 102-103.

<sup>95</sup> *Scapigliatura*, pp. 111-112, and note 44.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 112-147.

describe specific characteristics of Praga's poetry. Mariani is probably the scholar who has dedicated most effort to the study of Praga's poetic experimentation with less evident Baudelairean features, those that, according to him, belong more to an existential (and Decadent) 'maledettismo' than to a posturing (and 'Scapigliato') one. Mariani first explains that, in his opinion, notwithstanding the obvious influence, Praga's and Baudelaire's explicit realism ought not to be compared since Praga's is merely aesthetic and focused on its shocking and graphic aspects, thereby lacking the sensitivity, metaphysical insights, and symbolism of Baudelaire's.<sup>98</sup> Mariani firmly believes that, in more general terms, in *Penombre* Praga constantly attempts to interpret the image of the poet, and his tormented dualistic condition, 'in chiave baudelaireana'; it is in this existential stance, Mariani argues, that the relationship between Praga and Baudelaire should actually be investigated.<sup>99</sup> Mariani subsequently expands Binni and Petrucciani's ideas of fantastical and surreal associations that occur in certain passages of *Penombre*: he speaks of 'sensazioni audacissime, mirabilmente nuove', and of 'scomposizione della realtà stessa in immagini che si propongono la quasi totale dissoluzione del dato realistico'.<sup>100</sup> The scholar, however, clarifies that these images, as well as those related to the poet's distressing dualistic condition, are successively portrayed only occasionally in *Penombre*, intertwined with others drawn from writers such as Champfleury, Gautier, Henry Murger, and Heine, which carry very different, and sometimes anti-Baudelairean, significations.<sup>101</sup> Praga's multifaceted poetics, alongside his very own artistic and cultural limits, 'lo porterà a delibare e ad elaborare le singole immagini

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<sup>98</sup> *Storia della Scapigliatura*, pp. 229-230.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 252.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 245, 250.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 250-262.

de *Les Fleurs du Mal* più che il contesto espressivo baudelairiano'.<sup>102</sup> According to Mariani, only in the later sections of pictorial and 'landscape' poetry, namely 'Paesaggi' from *Fiabe e leggende* and 'Calendario' from *Trasparenze*, would Praga significantly appropriate one of Baudelaire's most precious lessons, where he would manage to move, if still not entirely, from a realistic and descriptive representation to a Baudelairian and subjective interpretation of nature.<sup>103</sup>

Whether apparent or profound, aesthetic or metaphysical, that is to say, 'Scapigliato' or Romantic/Decadent, 'maledettismo' has long been considered by scholars as Baudelaire's most significant influence on Praga's poetry, particularly in – yet not confined to – *Penombre*. Ilaria Crotti and Ricciarda Ricorda support this idea by affirming that '*Penombre* registra una prevalenza di toni ascrivibili al filone del maledettismo scapigliato': while in 'Meriggi', the first of the three sections of the collection, 'domina ancora il realismo impressionistico rilevato in *Tavolozza* [...] e permane una tendenza idilliaca', 'Vespri' and 'Mezzenotti' are characterised by 'un'accresciuta influenza baudelairiana ed una più programmatica adesione ai moduli scapigliati'.<sup>104</sup> Similarly, Nutini states that 'A partire dalla seconda raccolta la figura del poeta impegnato viene rimossa e le *Penombre* si rivolgono, con decisione, ai modelli d'oltralpe', in particular Baudelaire.<sup>105</sup> In order to justify Praga's unconvincing and ultimately inexperienced treatment of certain Baudelairian material from which the 'maledettismo scapigliato' derived – as if, especially when compared to the Decadent, Scapigliatura's 'maledettismo' was an artistic fault, or a defect, that needed to be justified – scholars pointed out not only qualitative but also

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 234.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., pp. 275-281.

<sup>104</sup> 'Scapigliatura e dintorni', in *Storia letteraria d'Italia: l'Ottocento*, tome III, ed. by Armando Balduino (Padua and Milan: Vallardi-Piccin Nuova Libreria, 1997), p. 1505.

<sup>105</sup> 'Sotto "il velo del quietismo"', p. 89.

stylistic, cultural, ideological, and moral differences. If Carnazzi claims that between Praga and Baudelaire there was ‘uno scarto netto, non solo di sensibilità ma di cultura, su cui influivano anche, ovviamente, insufficienze e limiti dell’esperienza scapigliata’,<sup>106</sup> Crotti and Ricorda focus on the critical and ideological gap: ‘Vi è tuttavia, al di là del divario tra gli esiti poetici dei due autori, una differenza fondamentale tra di loro sul piano ideologico, rintracciabile proprio nel persistente moralismo praghiano’.<sup>107</sup>

We certainly agree with Farinelli when he states that ‘Praga soffrì di essere incluso nei ranghi del maledettismo scapigliato’,<sup>108</sup> not only by his contemporaries but, in particular, by twentieth-century scholarship greatly influenced by Croce’s idealistic philosophy. Instead of discussing Praga’s flaws and defects – whether qualitative, stylistic, or conceptual – with respect to Baudelaire’s poetry, in order to study Praga’s complex Baudelaivism in *Penombre* and the potential evolution – or possible involution – of his poetics, we ought to put ‘Praga a simile livello e valorizza[re] la lezione che apprese da Baudelaire’, as Farinelli again asserts. Only then is it possible to entirely comprehend the complexity of Praga’s poetry, and ‘avverti di essere di fronte a un maestro e senti tutta la forza di un eclettismo attivo’.<sup>109</sup>

Underlying Praga’s freestanding situation with respect to Baudelaire means to grant an idiosyncratic status to Praga’s poetry, in particular to *Penombre*, which scholars have generally viewed more as a heterogeneous assortment of different styles and influences, rather than as the peculiar product of the talent of a capable

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<sup>106</sup> ““Les Fleurs du mal” e la poesia di Emilio Praga”, pp. 31-32.

<sup>107</sup> ‘Scapigliatura e dintorni’, p. 1500, note 77.

<sup>108</sup> *La Scapigliatura*, p. 127.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.



author. Thus, Baudelaire's influence can be approached from different angles and ultimately redefined, not relegated to such labels as 'maledettismo' – whether 'Scapigliato', Decadent, or Romantic – but more thoroughly investigated in its complexity. We have seen that in *Tavolozza* Baudelaire's presence is, contrary to what is commonly assumed, already very much felt; it is, also, multifaceted and can be linked, depending on the poem, to disparate and seemingly contrasting features alternatively belonging to the idyllic, working-class, nature-lover, macabre, intoxicated, rebellious, or lascivious Praga. In spite of the obvious textual borrowings from the *Fleurs* – in the many forms as noted above by scholars – and the emphasis on darker themes, in *Penombre* Praga's fundamental experimentation with Baudelairian material does not change as drastically as previously assumed by scholarship, as I shall demonstrate in this section of our chapter on Praga. Baudelaire is the great catalyst of Praga's poetic development, and there certainly is an evident development from the first to the fourth collection of poetry. However, when compared with the other collections, *Penombre* does not stand alone in Praga's poetic production as a sort of by-product of half-digested Baudelairian material. In *Penombre*, Praga's Baudelairism is genuinely multidimensional and tightly connected to both modernity and tradition, involving, using Baudelaire's terminology, not solely the 'Spleen' but also Praga's very personal – and seemingly anti-Baudelairian – 'Idéal'.

In this section we will see that Baudelaire's presence in 'Meriggi', considered as closer to the idyllic atmosphere of *Tavolozza* than to the succeeding gloomier sections of *Penombre*, is far more profound than formerly thought, in particular as regards the elements belonging to an idealistic and 'joyful' Baudelairism, or the grim

subjects of the *Fleurs* that Praga personally adapts and turns into positive imagery. We shall then move on to the analysis of the imagery of indoor seclusion and subjective introspection in ‘Meriggi’, which entails the study of the instances in which mimetic images are artistically transfigured, closely following the Baudelairian text. It shall also be shown that this aspect of Baudelaire’s influence, centred upon idyllic themes, extends to some poems of the much darker sections ‘Vespri’ and ‘Mezzenotti’, such as ‘A un feto’ and ‘Elevazione’, amongst horrendous and macabre subjects that serve as a polemic against both modern times and traditional values. Most notably, I will demonstrate that Praga’s Baudelairian interpretation of the language of nature, which scholars consider to feature only in Praga’s last two collections, namely as part of a more ‘mature’ and less ‘Scapigliato’ Praga, in fact goes back as far as *Penombre* and, in some cases – as we saw in Chapter II.1.7 with ‘Il poeta ubbriaco’ – even as far as *Tavolozza*. Ultimately, we shall see that in *Penombre* this subjective vision of nature implicates an active interaction between the sensations of the poet and natural objects, which is conveyed poetically through the intermingling of different sensory perceptions and synaesthesia.

## **2.2 ‘Meriggi’: a Baudelairian Idyll?**

Compared to the predominant disconsolate tone of ‘Vespri’ and, most particularly, ‘Mezzenotti’, ‘Meriggi’ is chiefly composed of poems celebrating happy moments, although even in this section sorrow, death, and religious polemic are constant looming presences. For the most part, Baudelaire’s influence on ‘Meriggi’ has been seen as exactly those looming presences that threaten a serene and idyllic atmosphere

deemed to be very distant from Baudelaire's poetry. Petrucciani argues that 'i *Meriggi*, con la loro semplicità e facilità di linguaggio, con il loro bonario realismo domestico e paesistico, si muovono sull'itinerario della prima poetica romantica';<sup>110</sup> therefore, as Bouffard affirms, when in 'Meriggi' Praga 'adopte une certaine forme de sensibilité baudelairienne, c'est avant tout en vue de scandaliser le lecteur'.<sup>111</sup> One exception would be 'Brianza' (PP, pp. 85-86), the opening poem of 'Meriggi' which, as Bouffard again notes,<sup>112</sup> is modelled on Baudelaire's 'Le Balcon' (OC I, pp. 36-37). Bouffard is right to point out the various similarities, which are indisputable: the musical use of the *strophe encadrée*; the evocation of memories of the intimate moments that the poet shared with his mistress in front of the hearth, and the eventual hope that these very moments would return in the future; the triple repetition of the 'O' in a single line, both in Baudelaire ('Ô serments! ô parfums! ô baisers infinis!', l. 30) and in Praga ('O pace, o solitudine, o dolcezze!', ll. 6, 10, 36, 40). Bouffard also underlines the dissimilarities, especially regarding the different tone and atmosphere: sensually erotic in 'Le Balcon'; innocently Platonic in 'Brianza', as if Praga wanted to copy his model without being able to entirely comprehend, or to follow, Baudelaire's poetic practice. As Bouffard writes, 'voici qu'à peine évoquée l'ombre de Baudelaire est comme exorcisée. Praga refuse l'alliance de l'acte charnel et des ténèbres. *L'idillismo* reprend ses droits'.<sup>113</sup>

Far from being Baudelaire's most sexually explicit poem, and even if it is part of the cycle dedicated to Jeanne Duval and erotic love, 'Le Balcon' expresses a love that is physical as much as sentimental, where expressions of intense eroticism or

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<sup>110</sup> *Emilio Praga*, p. 103.

<sup>111</sup> 'Un disciple de Baudelaire', p. 169.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 166-167.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

desire typical of Baudelaire's licentious compositions are substituted by more indefinite and allusive images ('ô baisers infinis') or by gentle demonstrations of fraternal love ('que ton cœur m'était bon!', l. 8; 'mes mains fraternelles', l. 19). Unlike most of the other poems that belong to this cycle, 'Le Balcon' is devoid of the sadism, violence, and wickedness generally associated with the *maudit* Baudelaire, which, according to Bouffard, Praga would have wanted to exorcise. In 'Le Balcon', 'passion is infused with tenderness', as Rosemary Lloyd claims.<sup>114</sup> This is a depiction of all-encompassing love, one of the various moments of ecstatic happiness of the *Fleurs*, where the woman described unites sensuality and idealism, 'the mother and the mistress, the sister and the queen',<sup>115</sup> and where Baudelaire celebrates the pleasures of indoor life in a fashion not dissimilar to 'Brianza'. After all, the phrase 'La douceur du foyer' (l. 4) employed in 'Le Balcon' is an image of comfortable domestic life, which Baudelaire often uses in his poetry 'to summon up all the attractions of a calm and stable home life'.<sup>116</sup> The lyrical I of this composition, who solemnly proclaims the feminine subject as being 'tous mes devoirs' (l. 2) for whom he makes vows of eternal love, stands opposite to the figure of the 'poète sinistre' as described in 'Les Deux bonnes sœurs', to the 'ennemi des familles, / Favori de l'enfer, courtesan mal renté' (OC I, p. 114, ll. 5-6).

Rather than the comprehensive depiction of a scene of ecstatic love, in 'Brianza' Praga is more focused on the sublimation of a past memory of a carefree time, which concerns projects of mutual love and prospective fame for the poet, and on the idealisation of the mistress, both represented with a religious and idealistic terminology: 'puri', 'beati', 'affetto', 'paradiso', 'sante gioie', 'speranze divine',

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<sup>114</sup> *Baudelaire's World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 98.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

‘dagli angeli protetta’, ‘buona’, ‘preghi il Signore’. Nonetheless, some of Baudelaire’s allusive expressions of physical and tender love of ‘Le Balcon’ are also retained, such as the ‘beauté des caresses’ (l. 3) that in Praga’s poem becomes ‘ed io la testa fra le tue carezze’ (l. 8). Praga is certainly more optimistic about the future of the poet’s relationship with his mistress and the related domestic life: first of all, he transforms the abstract declarations of eternal care and love of the couple in Baudelaire’s poem (the ‘devoirs’, the ‘impérissables choses’ uttered [l. 9], the ‘serments’) into concrete actions projected into a foreseeable future (‘Nessun ci toglie un angolo di terra’ [l. 35]); secondly, he turns Baudelaire’s question on the return of past love and happiness of the last stanza (‘Renaîtront-ils [...]?’ , ll. 26-30) into an affirmative statement (‘rifioriranno quei tempi d’amore; / [...] rifioriran, mia mesta giovinetta!’ ll. 27, 30).

As it has often occurred in scholarship on Baudelaire and Scapigliatura, in this instance Bouffard focused only on one aspect of Baudelaire’s poetry, namely that pertaining to the abovementioned ‘poète sinistre [...] ennemi des familles’. Bouffard does not take into account the characteristics of ‘Le Balcon’ that we have just analysed, which openly celebrate a peaceful domestic life solely devoted to the care of the mistress; nor the themes treated in the poems belonging to the second cycle of the *Fleurs* dedicated to Mme Sabatier and spiritual love; nor, finally, compositions that celebrate a light-hearted memory of youthful and innocent love that the speaker attempts to restore in a similar manner to ‘Le Balcon’, such as ‘Mœsta et errabunda’.

The most evident resemblance between ‘Brianza’ and ‘Mœsta et errabunda’ (OC I, pp. 63-64) is in their poetic structure, being both written in the *strophe*

*encadrée*. But the two poems also share the use of a religious and idealistic vocabulary that underlines the purity of the past recollection of love, which the poet strives to recreate in the present. We have already examined the religious terminology of ‘Brianza’; similarly, ‘Mœsta et errabunda’ features terms including ‘cœur’, ‘splendeur’, ‘clair’, ‘virginité’, ‘orgue’, ‘sublime’, ‘paradis parfumé’, ‘joie’, ‘volupté pure’, ‘vert paradis des amours enfantines’, ‘innocent paradis’. Praga appears to take up the juxtaposition between the sadness of the present, embodied by the ‘mesta giovinetta’ (ll. 26, 30) – who recalls the ‘Mœsta et errabunda’ of Baudelaire’s title – and the distant happiness of the past: ‘Che ce ne resta, o mia donna, a quest’ora?’ (l. 22). More textual references can be found in the lines ‘progetti inargentati / del vago argento che maschera il vero’ (ll. 13-14), which is similar, in the use of ‘inargentati’ and ‘argento’ as terms denoting the desired yet unattainable projects of the lovers, to the sought-after yet unreachable ‘voix argentine’ (l. 29) of Baudelaire’s paradise. Also the phrase ‘io per te meditavo un paradiso’ (l. 17), linked to the love plans of the couple, finds its correspondence in the noun ‘paradis’, repeated six times and best symbolising the yet uncorrupted relationship portrayed in ‘Mœsta et errabunda’. Most significantly, Baudelaire’s poem contains a representation of a scene of bucolic love that could easily be considered as an expression of Praga’s so-called ‘idillismo’, had it been written in Italian:

[...] le vert paradis des amours enfantines,  
 Les courses, les chansons, les baisers, les bouquets,  
 Les violons vibrant derrière les collines,  
 Avec les brocs de vin, le soir, dans les bosquets. (ll. 21-24)

This stanza, and in particular the phrase ‘le soir, dans les bosquets’, is the most likely source of the opening of ‘Brianza’. Note the similarity with the edenic and pastoral picture of the two lovers painted in the first stanza of Praga’s poem, especially with the twice-repeated ‘la sera in mezzo ai monti’:

Come è bella la sera in mezzo ai monti!  
Te ne ricordi?... ti ricordi quando  
si vagheggiava i rapidi tramonti,  
e tornavamo a braccio, e sussurrando:  
come è bella la sera in mezzo ai monti? (ll. 1-5)

In ‘Mœsta et errabunda’, however, Baudelaire is more interested in the opposition between the miserable present times in the ‘immonde cité’ (l. 2) and the memory of the ecstatic bucolic past that might already be ‘plus loin que l’Inde et que la Chine’ (l. 27), hence casting doubt on the possible re-creation of a similar paradisiac state with his lover. While preserving Baudelaire’s sense of loss of happiness in the present, Praga is more hopeful on the approaching future, at least in this section of *Penombre*: ‘Ma non è tutto, non è tutto spine / l’oggi’ (ll. 23-24).

Baudelaire’s juxtaposition between the malicious feelings caused by life in the modern city, and the longing for an elsewhere, an unadulterated and idyllic place – represented in his poetry by locations far distant in space and time and vaguely depicted – is taken up by Praga, for whom the escape from the gloomy everyday reality instead translates into a return to the serenity of familiar places. The escape from the splenetic city is the subject of another poem of the ‘Meriggi’ section, ‘Noli’, where the poet finds himself in a peaceful maritime village in Liguria, defined as ‘armoniosa quiete’ and ‘balsamo sospirato un anno intiero’ (PP, p. 99, ll. 1-2). The speaker is accompanied by his mistress, who is depicted in an oxymoronic – and indeed Baudelairian – fashion:

Come sei tutta buona e tutta bella,  
o ammaliatrice, o santa, o cortigiana!  
La tristezza, tua pallida sorella,  
    è la mezzana;

    e io ti stringo, ti mordo, amante offeso  
da cento mali, e tu m'intendi e taci:  
le tue carezze sono unguento steso,  
    nettare i baci. (ll. 5-12)

This comprehensive illustration of the feminine subject combines expressions taken from various poems of the *Fleurs*: 'tutta buona e tutta bella' is very close to 'À la très belle, à la très bonne' ('Que diras-tu ce soir...', OC I, p. 43, l. 3); 'ammaliatrice' calls into mind the numerous times in which Baudelaire has compared the mistress to a sorceress, praising her seductive powers and calling her 'enchanteresse' ('Le Beau navire', OC I, p. 51, l. 1) or 'Sorcière' ('Sed non satiata', OC I, p. 28, l. 4); 'santa' is akin to the idealisation of the mistress by means of religious terms that occurs in almost all the poems of the Mme Sabatier cycle, such as the 'Ange gardien' and 'Madone' of 'Que diras-tu ce soir...' (OC I, p. 43, l. 14) or the 'Déesse, Être lucide et pur' of 'L'Aube spirituelle' (OC I, p. 46, l. 8); 'cortigiana' recalls, finally, the many cases where Baudelaire discusses his experiences with courtesans, such as the 'courtisane' depicted in 'Remords posthume' (OC I, p. 35, l. 12). Yet, I would argue that on this occasion Praga employs the noun 'cortigiana' more as a symbol of the mistress' lust and erotic passion, rather than referring to an actual prostitute.

Apart from the textual borrowings, which are still critical in a comprehensive analysis of Baudelaire's influence on 'Noli', what is significant here is Praga's attempt to fully represent the feminine figure, to depict her various and sometimes contrasting roles in the relationship as both 'santa', the caring mother and sister capable to soothe the poet's sorrow, as well as 'cortigiana', the sensual mistress



displaying seduction and eroticism. In ‘Noli’, the poet carries with him an allegorical ‘convoglio di dolori’ from the city (PP, p. 100, l. 19), and only the serene atmosphere of the village during daytime, together with his lover, can temporarily relieve this suffering. But Praga does not use Baudelairean imagery, such as the enchantress, the courtesan, the sensual caresses and kisses, as the negative pole of the poem; I do not think that the idealistic scene is ‘mis en péril par l’évocation inattendue de la prostituée et de son amant’.<sup>117</sup> The poet’s mistress, merging sacredness and impiety, tenderness and eroticism, caresses and kisses, is a dynamic part of the soothing atmosphere that the poet is desperately looking for. Praga’s imagery and poetics (hence not only his vocabulary) can, on this occasion, easily be compared to such poems as the abovementioned ‘Le Balcon’ and others where Baudelaire represents the complexity of the woman and of the sentimental relationship.

In the last stanza of ‘Noli’, Praga introduces an element of exoticism in the representation of the feminine subject, describing the women inhabitants of ‘Noli’ as ‘Le negre donne tue che ritte stanno’ (PP, p. 102, l. 85). Praga is probably referring to the dark skin tone of the women who live in the seaside village, suntanned and constantly exposed to the sun. However, the adjective ‘negre’ is a peculiar word choice in this context, as if Praga wanted to create an exotic and almost tropical atmosphere surrounding the maritime landscape. Baudelaire had already praised the beauty of black women in tropical sceneries, such as in ‘À une dame créole’, where he celebrates the ‘brune enchanteresse’ (OC I, p. 62, l. 5), and in ‘Sed non satiata’ (OC I, p. 28), in which the ‘Sorcière au flanc d’ébène, enfant des noirs minuits’ (l. 4), the ‘Bizarre déité, brune comme les nuits’ (l. 1), is depicted. As a matter of fact, it is

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<sup>117</sup> Bouffard, p. 170.

not a coincidence that in the opening of 'Strimpellata', the composition that follows 'Noli', Praga uses the very same simile as the first line of 'Sed non satiata', as if to cling on the idea of Baudelairian exotic and mysterious women: 'Giovinettina bruna / come una bruna notte' (PP, p. 102, ll. 1-2).

In 'Meriggi', where Praga displays – or anxiously searches for – his positive ideal, beatitude, idyll, and pleasure that nevertheless seem transitory or already lost, his own sensibility powerfully emerges. That is why he includes very personal images in his poetry, representing his conception of the ideal or, at least, one side of it, such as the baby son (the series 'Canzoniere del bimbo'), the grandmother ('Memento'), or the familiar pastoral landscape ('Nevicata' and 'Egloga'). Also in these situations where Praga focuses on his own individual imagery, making precise references to his biography, Baudelaire's influence is very much present. This influence originates from multiple thematic areas of Baudelaire's poetry and is personally re-elaborated (and occasionally completely overturned) to fit Praga's own poetic discourse. One of these areas is the sentimental reminiscence of a person or a place in the poet's moments of childhood and of domestic serenity, whether an idyllic 'blanche maison, petite mais tranquille' out of town ('Je n'ai pas oublié...', OC I, p. 99, l. 2), truly the 'paysage élégiaque le plus émouvant que Baudelaire ait évoqué',<sup>118</sup> or a kind-hearted servant that raised the poet, such as in 'La servante au grand cœur...', which influenced many a poem of 'Meriggi', particularly 'Memento'.

'La servante au grand cœur...' (OC I, p. 100) tells of the hypothetical meeting, probably narrated to his jealous mother,<sup>119</sup> between the poet and the much-loved servant, dead at the time of narration. The servant was an 'âme pieuse', and if

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<sup>118</sup> Labarthe, *Baudelaire et la tradition de l'allégorie*, p. 451.

<sup>119</sup> See Jackson, *La Mort Baudelaire*, pp. 113-114.

one night she should come back from ‘son lit éternel’ to meet the speaker, she would ‘Couvrir l’enfant grandi de son œil maternel’, and some tears would ‘tomber [...] de sa paupière creuse’ (ll. 19-22). This poem can be considered as the source of Praga’s ‘Memento’ or, at the very least, the starting point of the composition. In ‘Memento’ (PP, pp. 115-117), Praga switches focus from the servant loved by the Baudelairean speaker to the adored grandmother who raised the poet, also introducing his recently born son in the picture. The heartrending, posthumous, and utterly imaginary meeting in ‘Memento’ would thus be between the deceased grandmother of the poet and his baby son. Praga preserves the hypothetical nature of this meeting, which is introduced by the conjunction ‘if’ in Baudelaire’s poem (‘si le soir, / Calme, dans le fauteuil je la voyais s’asseoir’, ll. 15-16), as well as in Praga’s: ‘se l’ava non fosse seppellita, / [...] s’ella visesse ancor’ (ll. 1, 3). Furthermore, Praga maintains the subsequent conditional clause that marks the implausible yet wished-for outcome of the counterfactual meeting between the dead and the living, namely between the servant and the poet in Baudelaire (‘Que pourrais-je répondre à cette âme pieuse’, l. 21), and the great-grandmother and the child in Praga (‘pensate il gaudio di appenderle al seno / della mia vita il giovinetto amor’ ll. 4-5). Baudelaire’s poetic subject wants to visit the servant’s tomb, to bring some flowers to the place where she ‘dort son sommeil’, that is to say ‘sous une humble pelouse’ (l. 2). This, according to Baudelaire, is a moral imperative; he wants to appease her agony, since the ‘Vieux squelettes gelés’ (l. 11) seem to suffer even more than the living: ‘Les morts, les pauvres morts, ont de grandes douleurs’ (l. 4). Praga paints a picture that is very much alike, affirming that the poet’s grandmother has been ‘seppellita’ and now ‘riposa’ (ll. 1, 16), describing the coldness of the burial ground and consequently of

the corpse in a similar manner to the Baudelairian ‘Vieux squelettes gelés’ (‘Ella è discesa nella fredda terra’, l. 31) and, most significantly, representing the act of visiting her tomb with the double repetition of a noun, and the association of that noun with the adjective ‘povera’ (‘La sua tomba [...] povera tomba, andiamola a trovar’, ll. 14-15) that is strikingly similar to ‘Les morts, les pauvres morts’ of Baudelaire’s poem. In ‘Memento’, Praga takes on from the *Fleurs* the elements most suitable to the image he wants to portray, particularly those referring to a pictorial and autobiographical realism. Even if ‘La servante au grand cœur...’ contains a distinctive element of realism, and a recollection of a familiar figure, however, Baudelaire’s final picture appears to be more sketched than accurately drawn. The real focus of the poem is, after all, the metaphysical substrate that drives the meditations of the speaker, centred upon his feelings of guilt for the solitude of the dead, and for the loved ones that once deceased are heartlessly forgotten by the living. As seen before, Praga is more optimistic than Baudelaire, and in this specific instance he is chiefly interested not in metaphysical thoughts, but in the happy memory of the grandmother and in the sad fact that the baby son will unfortunately not know her. The grandmother’s tenderness for the newborn child, as imagined by the poet, is clearly displayed in the following stanza, composed of very emotional expressions:

E non nato ti amò, povera donna,  
e pensò di attaccarti alla sua gonna,  
come si attacca un fior,  
e della sua celeste anima d’ava  
farne rugiada benedetta ancor! (ll. 26-30)

The melancholic and ‘domestic’ characteristics of ‘La servante au grand cœur...’ can also be found in two poems of ‘Meriggi’ that celebrate the delights of

indoor life as opposed to the boredom and monotony of the outside world, that is to say ‘Nevicata’ and ‘Sospiri all’inverno’. The former features the personification of a month, October, that is plainly drawn from ‘La servante au grand cœur...’. Praga does not simply make a textual reference, employing the same allegory – he also conveys the sense of desolation (and isolation) that October, and more generally the autumn, brings. Baudelaire writes that ‘Octobre souffle, émondeur des vieux arbres, / Son vent mélancolique’ (ll. 5-6), and Praga similarly employs the personification and the verb ‘to blow’ to define the actions of the month, associating October with melancholy, death (‘mi morîr cinque di rosa arboscelli’ [PP, p. 91, l. 9] which recalls the ‘émondeur des vieux arbres’), and monotony: ‘l’ottobre, soffiando, spruzzando, / ingiallì tutta la vasta campagna’ (ll. 5-6). Notwithstanding this melancholic note related to ‘La servante au grand cœur...’, the fulcrum of ‘Nevicata’ is the celebration of snow in wintertime – and the related indoor seclusion of the poet with his mistress – that finally changes the dullness of the autumnal landscape: ‘La bella neve! Scendete, scendete, / leggiadri fiocchi danzanti nei cieli’ (ll. 1-2).

In the poems of ‘Meriggi’ that we have analysed thus far, and ‘Nevicata’ is no exception, Praga is attracted to Baudelaire’s pictorial characteristics connected to the poet’s intimate poetic world, concerning both internal and external settings, natural and human subjects. Praga certainly seems to draw from the pictorial features of Baudelaire’s poetry, mainly its descriptive and mimetic forms, as seen while comparing ‘Memento’ to ‘La servante au grand cœur...’. However, this is simply one aspect, certainly valued by Praga, of the Baudelairian influence involving the poetic representation of pictorial sceneries; Praga does not focus solely on Baudelaire’s most realistic images. In ‘Nevicata’, for instance, Praga’s peculiar

experimentation with Baudelairian material entails a transformation of an image initially depicted in a mimetic manner into a visionary one, driven by a subjective impression centred upon an anthropomorphic figure and formally introduced by means of a simile: ‘senza l’ammanto di viti i cancelli / sembrano soldati disposti in vedetta’ (PP, p. 91, ll. 11-12). This line is liberally adapted from a poem where Baudelaire impressionistically depicts a wintry night, namely ‘La Cloche fêlée’. Baudelaire uses the same simile of the soldier-watchman that stands guard in wintertime to describe not, like Praga, the visual image of the gate but the piercing chime of a bell: ‘Bienheureuse la cloche [...] Jette fidèlement son cri religieux, / Ainsi qu’un vieux soldat qui veille’ (OC I, p. 72, ll. 5, 7-8). This is no simple borrowing of an expression, but a more complex adaptation to a different context of a technique that would play a significant role in *Penombre*, alongside the mimetic depiction of pictorial subjects.

### 2.3 Indoor Seclusions and Idealistic Introspections

The introspective modification of a scenery and the association between landscape and human figures return in the closing stanza of ‘Nevicata’, where Praga truly praises the beauties of ‘Domus et placens uxor’ (‘home and a pleasing wife’) during a cold winter day, as Horace’s quotation used as the epigraph to the poem suggests. The company of the tender and caring lover modifies the poet’s perception of the bleak January landscape, introducing a mild spring breeze – metaphorically originated from the woman and her love – in the winter scenery, which is eventually transformed, subjectively, into a veritable picture of spring:

Della mia donna nel fervido cuore

aleggia sempre una brezza gentile,  
e quando ricco il poeta è d'amore  
anche il gennaio somiglia all'aprile. (PP, p. 92, ll. 25-28)

Similarly, in Baudelaire's 'Chant d'automne', the poet seeks the gentleness and love of the mistress (defined as differently as 'mother', 'mistress', and 'sister'), as well as the pleasures of indoor life, in order to escape the thought of the cold impending winter. Since the desired natural scenery featuring 'le soleil rayonnant sur la mer' (OC I, p. 57, l. 20) is inaccessible, the speaker substitutes it with the tender love of the feminine subject that warms and comforts him, as if it were the rays of a late autumnal sun before winter begins:

Et pourtant aimez-moi, tendre cœur! soyez mère,  
Même pour un ingrat, même pour un méchant;  
Amante ou sœur, soyez la douceur éphémère  
D'un glorieux automne ou d'un soleil couchant. (ll. 21-24)

Baudelaire's multidimensional influence in 'Meriggi', related to features as varied as pictorial realism and introspection, hopefulness and monotony, tradition and modernity, is best exemplified in 'Sospiri all'inverno' (PP, pp. 89-91), another poem about wintertime. Scholars, including Nardi, Bouffard, and Mariani, have pointed out Baudelaire's significant presence in this poem. The first two speak of a general inspiration that Praga apparently drew from 'Paysage', the opening poem of the pictorial section 'Tableaux parisiens' of the 1861 edition of the *Fleurs*, in particular as regards the poet's yearning for isolation and indoor reclusion in a cold winter setting, and his focus on the subjective evocation of springtime landscapes.<sup>120</sup> Mariani, on the other hand, instead of focusing on the similarities between 'Sospiri all'inverno' and 'Paysage', outlines the capital influence that other poets had on the

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<sup>120</sup> Nardi, *Scapigliatura*, pp. 113-114; Bouffard, pp. 167-168.

former poem, most notably Murger and his poetic ‘réalisme’; then, Mariani discusses the only passage of ‘Sospiri all’inverno’ in which, according to him, Praga transfigures reality in a Baudelairean manner, by means of an image that gives a voice and female characteristics to an object, namely ‘Le gonne allor bisbigliano / come servette in maggio’ (ll. 41-42).<sup>121</sup> To be sure, all these scholars have made good and reasonable points, but I am convinced that Baudelaire’s actual presence in ‘Sospiri all’inverno’ is not simply restricted to an analogous yet broad thematic subject, or to a single image inspired not by a specific poem but, far more theoretically, by Baudelaire’s poetic technique.

‘Paysage’ (OC I, p. 82) is a true celebration of the innumerable artistic possibilities that snow-enforced indoor seclusion provides, where Baudelaire proclaims his desire to ‘composer chastement [s]es églogues’ and ‘tout ce que l’Idylle a de plus enfantin’ (ll. 1, 20). (Baudelaire also paints a similar positive picture of winter seclusion in the section ‘Un mangeur d’opium’ of *Les Paradis artificiels*, where winter is ‘la saison du bonheur’, indoor life is greatly sought after, and Baudelaire rhetorically asks: ‘Une jolie habitation ne rend-elle pas l’hiver plus poétique, et l’hiver n’augmente-t-il pas la poésie de l’habitation?’ OC I, p. 475). Compared to ‘Paysage’, ‘Sospiri all’inverno’ maintains a similar vocabulary involving the seasons that change continuously as the poem progresses and the atmospheric elements linked to the depiction of the different climates: ‘inverno’, ‘dicembre’, ‘pioggie’, ‘nevi’, ‘luglio’, ‘aprile’, ‘nebbia’, ‘maggio’, ‘estate’, in ‘Sospiri all’inverno’; and ‘vent’, ‘brumes’, ‘printemps’, ‘étés’, ‘automnes’, ‘hiver’, ‘neiges’, ‘Printemps’, in ‘Paysage’. Baudelaire considers the winter landscape as

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<sup>121</sup> *Storia della Scapigliatura*, pp. 227-229.



being tedious ('l'hiver aux neiges monotones', l. 14), and in his poem the change in scenery and season regularly follows the cyclical course of time ('Je verrai les printemps, les étés, les automnes', l. 13). In Praga it is instead the summer spectacle that is utterly monotonous, hence triggering a swift and brusque artificial modification of landscape and season (from summer straight to winter) that is compared, with an image worthy of Baudelaire's most audacious and modern passages (but also comparable to some Rimboldian images),<sup>122</sup> to a mechanical change of scene in a theatre or maybe in a nineteenth-century diorama, which anticipates the introspective change of scenery (from winter back to summer and spring) that occurs afterwards in the third stanza:

Stanco son io di splendidi  
cieli e fronzute piante;  
mi annoia lo spettacolo  
di una beltà costante;  
venga il dicembre, ed operi  
un cambiamento a vista:  
un grazie al macchinista  
dal petto esalerò. (ll. 1-8)

In 'Paysage', Baudelaire speaks of the need for imagination and reverie ('féeriques palais', l. 16; 'je rêverai', l. 17; 'évoquer le Printemps', l. 24) in his entirely subjective re-creation of a natural spring scene, whereas Praga is more interested in the wintertime evocation of the personal memories of spring that the artist needs in order to complete his work of art. Praga's representation, however intimate and introspective, still maintains a link with past reality, as we see in the following stanza, whereby the preference for mnemonic evocation of a natural landscape over a mimetic representation of it is clearly noticeable:

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<sup>122</sup> See for instance the surreal juxtaposition of theatrical scenes and real landscapes in the prose poem 'Scènes' (Rimbaud, p. 311), part of the collection *Illuminations* (first published in 1886).

Come cadenze tremule  
 di cori in lontananza,  
 belle, ridenti, tiepide,  
 nella tranquilla stanza  
 tornano le memorie  
 del luglio e dell'aprile,  
 a colorir lo stile  
 del pallido pittor. (ll. 17-24)

Even if in 'Paysage' Baudelaire refers principally to a dreamlike scenery detached from reality, in his poetry the idea of reverie is frequently accompanied by that of memory. In the above stanza, Praga applies a Baudelairian mnemonic method that is found in many poems of the *Fleurs* and is also discussed in Baudelaire's critical writings, such as in the *Salon de 1846* where 'le souvenir' is described as 'le grand criterium de l'art' (OC II, p. 455).<sup>123</sup> The evocation of memories that in the third stanza of 'Sospiri all'inverno' is associated with musical and vocal 'cadenze tremule / di cori in lontananza' heard by the poet/painter is, as a matter of fact, taken from 'La Cloche fêlée', where Baudelaire writes that it is 'amer et doux, pendant les nuits d'hiver' to hear 'Les souvenirs lointains lentement s'élever / Au bruit des carillons qui chantent dans la brume' (OC I, p. 71, ll. 1, 3-4). Moreover, in the same stanza of 'Sospiri all'inverno' the image of the artist who voluntarily paints from memory shares the very same idea as a well-known passage from 'Une charogne':

Les formes s'effaçaient et n'étaient plus qu'un rêve,  
 Une ébauche lente à venir,  
 Sur la toile oubliée, et que l'artiste achève  
 Seulement par le souvenir. (OC I, p. 32, ll. 29-32)

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<sup>123</sup> See also the chapter 'L'Art mnémonique' in the *Peintre de la vie moderne*. For an analysis of the connection between art and memory in Baudelaire's critical and poetic writings, see Hiddleston's study, *Baudelaire and the Art of Memory*.

This tendency to introspection and transfiguration of reality is evident throughout ‘Sospiri all’inverno’ on multiple levels: the configuration of the poem itself, which follows a non-linear narration of the alternation of seasons; the poet’s desire to ‘l’uscio inchiodare’ and ‘cantar l’inverno’ (ll. 15-16) through the re-creation of an idyllic artificial spring, which finds an antecedent in ‘Paysage’; the images chosen to represent this ‘exteriorisation’ of the inner world, which mark the transposition from a wintry scenery to a spring one, such as the aforementioned ‘Le gonne allor bisbigliano / come servette in maggio’; but also the concluding line ‘la stalattite è un fior’ (l. 64) that entails the surreal perception of a natural winter object as a spring flower. The idea behind the conclusion of ‘Sospiri all’inverno’, where in his ‘canti’ the ‘bardo’ overturns, once again and for one final time, winter into spring and summer (ll. 57-64), calls into mind the transformation of the cold January scenery by means of the mistress’ love featuring in ‘Nevicata’, which follows ‘Sospiri all’inverno’ in the section ‘Meriggi’. In actuality, both passages, and in particular ‘Nevicata’ with expressions such as ‘cuore’, ‘brezza gentile’, ‘amore’, and ‘aprile’ that underline the personal and inner modification of the wintry setting, share a similar imaginative process (and vocabulary) as the subjective evocation that concludes ‘Paysage’:

Car je serai plongé dans cette *volupté*  
 D’évoquer le *Printemps* avec ma volonté,  
 De tirer un *soleil* de mon *cœur*, et de faire  
 De mes pensers brûlants une *tiède atmosphère*. (ll. 23-26, my italics)

However, while in ‘Paysage’ Baudelaire puts into practice this method in a considerable manner, displaying various idealistic images that are the result of the reverie of the poet, such as the ‘horizons bleuâtres’ and the ‘oiseaux chantant soir et

matin' (ll. 17, 19), Praga's declaration of intent, apart from the expressions quoted above, remains mostly theoretical and is not met with an extensive application. Alongside the discussed propensity to introspection, in 'Sospiri all'inverno' Praga writes about the beauties of domestic life in a similar fashion as 'Nevicata' and 'Memento', using seemingly realistic and mimetic descriptions of home furniture and loving female characters. These descriptions have been deemed by Mariani as originating, most notably, from Murger's pictorial technique of detailed representation of indoor dwellings. Mariani quotes, amongst others, the following extract from 'Le Requiem d'amour', which is set on a cold winter's day:<sup>124</sup>

La houille pétillait; en chauffant sur les cendres,  
La bouilloire chantait son refrain régulier  
Et faisait un orchestre au bal des salamandres  
Qui voltigeaient dans le foyer.<sup>125</sup>

Which he compares to the fourth stanza of 'Sospiri all'inverno':

E accosciata in un angolo  
al muro crepitante,  
sospirata e pettegola  
come una vecchia amante,  
la stufa mi consiglia  
a non varcar la soglia,  
e alle dolcezze invoglia  
del solingo lavor. (ll. 25-32)

The general illustration of the interiors is evidently analogous. This kind of detailed representation of indoor spaces and objects was rather commonplace in mid-nineteenth-century French poetry and, perhaps surprisingly, finds a significant place in Baudelaire's poetry as well. Taking into account not the general picture but the specific register and expression used in the fourth stanza of 'Sospiri all'inverno', the

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<sup>124</sup> *Storia della Scapigliatura*, pp. 226-227.

<sup>125</sup> *Les Nuits d'hiver: poésies complètes* (Paris: Lévy Frères, 1876), p. 26.

womanly personification of the wood stove crouched down in a corner of the room sighing and speaking is, in fact, akin to the following depictions of the hissing and singing wood log in the fireplace and of the female servant huddled up in the corner of a room, in the second half of Baudelaire's 'La servante au grand cœur...':

Lorsque la bûche siffle et chante [...]  
Si, par une nuit bleue et froide de décembre,  
Je la trouvais tapie en un coin de ma chambre. (OC I, p. 100, ll. 15, 16-17)

As often happens in his poetry, Praga here combines two separate images of Baudelaire's poem, the wood log and the feminine figure, hence creating a brand new one that cannot be considered as solely realistic, since the personification transfigures the mimetic image and provides the object with anthropomorphic features. In Baudelaire's work, this kind of description of the anthropomorphic wood log, to which the speaker gives a human voice, is not exclusive of 'La servante au grand cœur...'. In 'Spleen' (LXXV), the domestic and pictorial features of which had a well-defined impact on Praga's 'La libreria' (see Chapter II.1.3), the human characterisation of sighing and singing furniture – including the wood log in the fireplace – is plain: 'Le bourdon se lamente, et la bûche enfumée / Accompagne en fausset la pendule enrhumée' (OC I, p. 72, ll. 9-10).

This personification of an indoor place, where the sound of various objects is interpreted as speaking, lamenting, or singing voices, is not absent in 'Paysage': Baudelaire speaks of the 'atelier qui chante et qui bavarde' (OC I, p. 82, l. 6). The methodology behind this poem is plainly visually and pictorially driven, as the title of the poem suggests, but it does not feature only what could be called landscapes of imagination. The poem is divided, in a similar yet more schematic manner than 'Sospiri all'inverno', into two different types of visual representations: mimetic-

realistic (ll. 1-13); and introspective-imaginative (ll. 14-26). But unlike 'Sospiri all'inverno' the first section is not dedicated to the glorification of idealistic indoor life, quite the opposite – it is an idyllic urban landscape of the city of Paris admired from the poet's attic room, with its 'tuyaux', 'clochers', 'grands ciels', and 'fleuves de charbon' (ll. 7-8, 11). Further on we shall see that although Baudelaire's depiction of urban sceneries was an important source material for Praga, the latter generally associates the city solely with a profoundly negative imagery.

Ultimately, Praga treasured Baudelaire's peculiar treatment of wintry and autumnal seclusion, and all the fundamental aspects that accompany this subject, both natural (wind, fog, rain, snow, sun), as well as human (indoor settings, introspections, and the company of the mistress). Apart from 'Paysage' and 'Chant d'automne', Baudelairean poems such as 'Brumes et pluies' (OC I, pp. 100-101) celebrate these 'blafardes saisons, reines de nos climats' spent with the lover 'sur un lit hasardeux' (ll. 11-14), namely the 'fins d'automne, hivers, printemps trempés de boue' that the poet loves and adores (ll. 1-2). However, in 'Meriggi' Praga voluntarily decides to ignore the ambivalent feelings Baudelaire often associates with this imagery, the attraction and repulsion that the French poet alternatively shows in the *Fleurs*, such as in the aforementioned 'Chant d'automne' and 'La servante au grand cœur...', but also in 'Brumes et pluies' and 'La Cloche fêlée', where the 'nuits d'hiver' are openly bittersweet. Praga intended 'Meriggi' to be – however fleeting and ephemeral – a hopeful and positive section, a sort of poetic sanctuary before 'Vespri' and 'Mezzenotti', where the feelings of doubt and despair – yet with sparse glimpses of hope – prevail. That is why the general tone of the poems in 'Meriggi' that involve winter or autumn settings and indoor seclusion, despite conspicuous

Baudelairian elements, are in fact closer to the exaltation of the beauties of indoor life and the fireplace of poets such as Gautier, who in ‘Chant du grillon’, ‘Veillée’, ‘Le Coin du feu’, and ‘Frisson’ shares the same jovial atmosphere as that depicted by Praga (see, for instance, expressions such as ‘oh benedetto il mio piccolo guscio!’ in ‘Nevicata’, PP, p. 92, l. 19). This does not mean that Praga did not dedicate himself to the representation of gloomy and melancholic feelings associated with the observation of a landscape. Such poems of the last two sections of *Penombre* as ‘Marzo’ and above all ‘Ottobre’, which preserves and expands the Baudelairian cue of a desolate and depressing October with expressions including ‘Piangono come vedove le biade’ and ‘nelle tombe scheletri grondanti’ (PP, p. 179, ll. 5, 11), are composed of sceneries that indirectly convey the poet’s disconsolate mood. Nonetheless, these kinds of splenetic landscapes, depicted by Baudelaire in several compositions including the series ‘Spleen’, would influence Camerana, who would directly and not implicitly link sceneries to the negative emotions of the poet, more than Praga, as shall be shown in Chapter III.5.

## **2.4 An Anticatholic and Antipositivist Polemic: ‘A un feto’**

The influence of Baudelaire’s idealistic and idyllic features is not limited to ‘Meriggi’, but extends to the rest of *Penombre*, including ‘Vespri’ and ‘Mezzenotti’. ‘A un feto’ (PP, pp. 152-158), part of the section ‘Vespri’, has largely been conceived as one of the finest examples of Praga’s aesthetic ‘maledettismo’, as well as of the dualistic principles of his poetry; in the past scholars have associated it with Baudelaire’s ‘Une charogne’ (OC I, pp. 31-32), mainly in terms of thematic affinities. Marinari acknowledges the resemblance between the two poems with regards to the

antithesis between two very different imageries, one connected to light and life and another to darkness and death, but he rejects any textual comparison. He considers it a general likeness, and he argues that ‘*Ad [sic] un feto* del Praga [...] nasce dal Baudelaire e dalla sua *Charogne*, ma non solo da essa, bensì soprattutto dal clima che per essa si determina’, the abovementioned antithesis being ‘il motivo tipico dei *maudits*’.<sup>126</sup> Petrucciani, on the other hand, finds a more direct correspondence between the two compositions, albeit restricted to one passage of ‘A un feto’, that is to say the following contrast between the objective beauty of the summer day and the disgust of the speaker of lines 13-14 and 17: ‘vidi una cosa orribile / vidi di un uomo il feto; / [...] Era un bel dì di luglio’. Petrucciani rightly associates these lines with Baudelaire’s ‘Rappelez-vous l’objet que nous vîmes, mon âme, / Ce beau matin d’été si doux: / [...] une charogne infâme’ (ll. 1-3).<sup>127</sup>

Scholarship has solely scratched the surface as regards the Baudelairian presence in ‘A un feto’. This poem treats a similar subject to Boito’s ‘Lezione d’anatomia’, written after ‘A un feto’ (in June 1865) and involving images of corpses and foetuses that represent the hideous side of contemporary reality, juxtaposing them to sublime elements in a manner analogous not only to ‘A un feto’, but also to ‘Une charogne’, as we have seen in Chapter I.1.4. Thereby, the artistic significance of Baudelaire’s lesson as displayed in ‘Une charogne’ should not be underestimated. Besides what has already been pointed out by Marinari and Petrucciani, in ‘A un feto’ Praga’s debt towards ‘Une charogne’ can be divided into three different categories, which are interrelated: semantic, stylistic, and thematic. The affinities between the two poems comprise of various aspects belonging to the three categories just

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<sup>126</sup> *Emilio Praga, poeta di una crisi*, p. 62.

<sup>127</sup> *Emilio Praga*, p. 32.



mentioned. Firstly, a specific macabre and medical register ('pourriture', 'carcasse', 'horrible', 'infection', in 'Une charogne'; 'cadaveri', 'etica', 'putredini', 'orribile', in 'A un feto') alternated with an idealistic terminology concerning the beauty of nature ('Le soleil rayonnait', 'grande Nature', 'fleur', 'l'eau courante'; 'fiori', 'stagno', 'raggi il sol diluvia', 'immensa è la natura'). Secondly, oxymora that combine contrasting feelings of affection and revulsion ('amours décomposés'; 'orrendo bacio'). Thirdly, the portrayal of a love relationship and correlated amorous gestures by means of morbid imagery representing, ironically and antiphrastically, the impossible idealisation of death and its eventual inevitability, in spite of the love and care demonstrated. The last two points are intrinsically connected, in 'Une charogne', whereby the peculiar unity of love and death – and the related concurrence of an idealistic and a macabre vocabulary – is represented in the concluding stanza by the image of the graveyard worm that gruesomely 'mangera de baisers' the poet's mistress, leaving him with only the very visual memory of his 'amours décomposés' (ll. 45-48); and in 'A un feto'. In this latter, Praga takes Baudelaire's idea of 'decomposed loves' and love-death union further, depicting the following pictorial image (hence the imperative 'Guarda' repeated twice) of the putrefied foetus of a twin brother and sister who died while embraced in a loving yet macabre kiss:

Guarda: son due putredini  
ed eran due gemelli,  
concetti insieme al gaudio  
di chiamarsi fratelli;  
guarda: un orrendo bacio  
nell'almo sen li strinse,  
e colla morte avvinse  
gli sventurati amor... (ll. 145-152)

In ‘A un feto’ it is certainly easy to point out the images that belong to a purely graphic ‘maledettismo’, to the horrible and the hideous, the role of which appears to be, at first blush, to scandalise the reader, be it the ‘poveri / avanzi imbalsamati’ of the corpses (ll. 1-2), among which the ‘torso di un ginnastico’ and the hand of a girl who died of tuberculosis, or the foetuses that the poet finds in the museum of anatomy (ll. 9-16). The shocking properties of this poem are undeniable – as are those of ‘Une charogne’ and ‘Lezione d’anatomia’ – and were probably aimed at scandalising a certain audience, but they are hardly the sole purpose of ‘A un feto’. Another focus of this composition is the vehement polemic against two symmetrically opposed forces: the ‘scienza feroce’ (l. 7), which keeps these foetuses and the other ‘orride / burle della natura’ (ll. 113-114) on display for posterity, giving no solace to the parents and loved ones (ll. 105-152), calling into mind Boito’s own polemic against progress and science seen in Chapter I; and God, who appears to have neither real design nor control over the process of birth of the human being, especially when malformed foetuses are born, being childbirth based on pure chance (ll. 49-104). This harsh polemic is enclosed between two sections that denote the poet’s attempts to antithetically oppose an idealistic chant, characterised by references to nature and intimate domestic life, to controversial and gruesome imagery. The idyllic chant is not devoid of Baudelairian elements: the focal section of the idyll, namely the celebration of the sun of lines 17-34, bears many resemblances with Baudelaire’s ‘Le Soleil’ (OC I, p. 83), a veritable ‘hymn to the sun’.<sup>128</sup> The sun is the affectionate and caring presence behind the serene picture portrayed in lines 17-34 of ‘A un feto’:

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<sup>128</sup> Leakey, p. 14.

Era un bel dì di luglio;  
dagli ampi finestroni  
piovean cadenze e balsami  
di fiori e di canzoni;  
brillavano le mummie  
nelle corteccie frolle,  
e dalle vecchie ampolle  
frangea scintille il sol.

Il sol che le miriadi  
dei vermi e degli insetti,  
giù, nell'orto botanico,  
scalda ai fecondi affetti,  
e in un bacio affamiglia  
il ciel, lo stagno, il sasso,  
e il giovin granchio al passo  
aiuta, e il nibbio al vol.

Il sol che vide al placido  
balcone una fanciulla.

We can certainly compare this loving and fatherly figure that indiscriminately warms and invigorates vile and noble creatures alike – as different as earthworms and birds – in the botanical garden, as well as young girls, to the ‘père nourricier’ that ‘Éveille dans les champs les vers comme les roses’ of Baudelaire’s poem (ll. 9-10), the sun that fills ‘les ruches de miel’ and ‘rajeunit les porteurs de béquilles / Et les rend gais et doux comme des jeunes filles, / Et commande aux moissons de croître et de mûrir’ (ll. 12-15). Once again, Praga draws from a Baudelairian personification involving a non-human character that can hardly be considered realistic or mimetic but that is, admittedly, idealistic. Furthermore, Praga preserves from ‘Le Soleil’ the Romantic idea of unity of the natural world and the related love register employed to depict nature. If in ‘Le Soleil’ the sun ‘fait s’évaporer les soucis vers le ciel’ and nature is ‘le cœur immortel qui toujours veut fleurir’ (ll. 11, 16), in ‘A un feto’ the sun ‘scalda ai fecondi affetti, / e in un bacio affamiglia / il ciel, lo stagno, il sasso’. With the

same words that Leakey used to describe ‘Le Soleil’, we could argue that in ‘A un feto’ the sun ‘acts as a unifying, as well as a “nutritive” and recuperative force’.<sup>129</sup>

The idea that the sun possesses restorative qualities is a central one in this idyllic section of ‘A un feto’, and not only for the creatures living outdoor in the botanical garden. The sun also enters, through large windows, the museum, thus making hideous and vile items, such as decayed mummies and vials containing foetuses, shine and sparkle (ll. 17-24). This is the idealistic core of the poem, which also recurs as the second to last stanza. The process of beautification (and indeed aesthetic idealisation) of those ugly subjects derives, most notably, from two sources. One is Boito’s oxymoronic representation of the horrible yet simultaneously charming mummy in ‘A una mummia’ and marble torso in ‘Un torso’, hence probably the references to the ‘mummie’ and ‘torso di un ginnastico’ in ‘A un feto’; the second one is Baudelaire’s transmutation of ugly contemporary reality into beauty as variously displayed in his ‘flowers of evil’, including the third and concluding stanza of ‘Le Soleil’, in which the sun penetrates hospitals and ennobles dreadful things, utterly transforming the hideous aspects of the city:

Quand, ainsi qu’un poète, il descend dans les villes,  
Il ennoblit le sort des choses les plus viles,  
Et s’introduit en roi, sans bruit et sans valets,  
Dans tous les hôpitaux et dans tous les palais. (ll. 17-20)

There is much more to Baudelaire’s influence on ‘A un feto’ than the scarce thematic and textual similarities with ‘Une charogne’ highlighted by Marinari and Petrucciani. Even the peculiar combination of vocal music and fragrances of flowers that enter the museum of lines 18-19, that is to say ‘piovean cadenze e balsami / di fiori e di

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<sup>129</sup> Baudelaire and Nature, p. 14.

canzoni', finds its antecedent in the olfactory and musical harmony of 'Harmonie du soir', and in Baudelaire's analogical theories displayed in 'Correspondances'.

However, Praga's and Baudelaire's idyllic sections have pronounced differences as well. It is revealing in itself that while in the last quatrain of 'Le Soleil' Baudelaire speaks of a broad beautification of the city, including the inhabitants of hospitals, by means of a sun that is likened to the figure of the poet thereby drawing a parallel between the natural and the artistic processes of aestheticisation, Praga is far more specific, describing solely the natural 'aesthetic' power of the sun and confining the sublime transformation to mummies and vials containing foetuses. The reason Praga's brief attempt to transmute ugliness into beauty is confined exclusively to these two anthropological artefacts is that in 'A un feto', as well as in the other poems of *Penombre*, he does not participate in Baudelaire's effort 'de "pastoralisation" de la ville',<sup>130</sup> to turn the urban landscape into an idyllic scenery of happiness and ecstasy represented in 'Le Soleil' and, as previously shown, also in 'Paysage'. In 'A un feto', Praga keeps sublime elements (belonging to nature) and horrible ones (belonging to the human being) for the most part separated, and when they are merged it is either to underline the restorative abilities of nature or to be polemically ironic about the potential poetic sublimation of corpses, as with the aforementioned union of love and death (and the foetuses of the twins) and the related oxymoron 'orrendo bacio'. On a purely aesthetic note, Praga essentially maintains the contrast between conventional beauty and ugliness. This was, without doubt, due to Boito's aesthetic and artistic influence. Both Praga and Boito employ figures of speech such as oxymora and antitheses in a similar

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<sup>130</sup> Labarthe, *Baudelaire et la tradition de l'allégorie*, p. 452.

fashion in order to portray comprehensively a dualistic, and sometimes paradoxical, reality. But while Boito rejects a Classical notion of beauty and relies heavily on irony in order to cope with this loss, it is evident that, on the one hand, Praga discards conventional poetic sublimations and derides them through juxtaposition with ugliness, violent images, and irony; and on the other, he retains a certain faith in, and attraction to, traditional beauty, associating it, predominantly, with nature and the idea of the moral Good. The power (and the right) to transmute things, to ‘ennoble’ them, belongs, therefore, more to nature itself than to the artistic qualities of the poet. Even though Praga describes foetuses as horrendous ‘burle della natura’, he never accuses nature directly of cruelty, preferring instead, as we shall see below, to blame God for the ruthless malformation of the foetuses. After all, Praga *voluntarily* chose to ignore Baudelaire’s ambivalent stance towards the sun (and indirectly towards nature) that emerges when comparing the second and third stanzas of ‘Le Soleil’ to the first, where Baudelaire discusses the cruelty of the sun in a setting that is both urban and pastoral: ‘le soleil cruel frappe à traits redoublés / Sur la ville et les champs’ (ll. 3-4).

Equally symptomatic of Praga’s and Baudelaire’s different positions on the capability of poetry to beautify the horrible subjects of contemporary reality is the fact that, in the conclusion of ‘Le Soleil’, Baudelaire associates the sun with the figure of the wandering poet, a sun that with its flâneur-like features is ‘vaguely god-like in his ministration to the careworn and crippled’.<sup>131</sup> Baudelaire presents this association – which implicitly entails, I would argue, the transfer of aesthetic powers from the poet to the sun, that is to say from the artist to nature, as if nature copied the

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<sup>131</sup> Leakey, p. 14.

actions of the artist, and not the other way round – in a wholly positive manner. In the seventh stanza of ‘A un feto’, in an almost opposite fashion, Praga instead links the figure of the poet to the heartless God, speaking of the ‘poeta celeste’ who has erroneously created ugliness, namely the ‘laido sgorbio’ that is the foetus (ll. 57-58). Moreover, Praga takes his cue from the image of the poet in ‘Le Soleil’ that, whilst exploring the modern city, discovers ‘les hasards de la rime, / Trébuchant sur les mots’ and ‘Heurtant parfois des vers depuis longtemps rêvés’ (ll. 6-8). Yet Praga turns this cue into the negative metaphor of God as a poet who, in the process of conceiving of the human being, ‘Incespica a una rima’ (l. 55), hence creating a deformed foetus.

In the central section (ll. 49-152) of ‘A un feto’, the speaker’s acrimonious accusations towards science and God are dotted with what can be considered a genuine longing for respite in nature. However, unlike the initial idealistic and hopeful chant of lines 17-34, nature at this stage cannot give relief or consolation, in a situation where the poet is overwhelmed by the surrounding ugliness, cruelty, and death (‘la mano infanticida’, l. 68) caused by the actions of an uncaring God (defined as ‘seren’, l. 80, a term representing both the clear sky and the untroubled God). The latter seems to use nature in a deceptive manner to divert the human being’s attention from the grim aspects of life that, according to the poet, are of God’s making. To God, the ‘ebete / mondo’ appears ‘giulivo’ (ll. 89-90), misleadingly claiming that ‘raggi il sol diluvia, / che immensa è la natura’ (ll. 83-84). Although there appears to be a hint of controversy with nature, what Praga actually argues is that although God turns a blind eye on the horrors of the ‘patimenti umani’, products of modernity which science insensitively preserves for future display to humanity (ll. 108, 117-

120), the poet must portray them in his dualistic art at the opposite spectrum of the ideal, lowering the register so as to include prosaic and scientific terms ('e la superna Idea / al fango aggiogherem', ll. 111-112). In actuality, Praga's argument here is with God and science, not nature, subtly redirecting Baudelaire's polemic that in 'Une charogne' is unmistakably towards nature, or, in other words, towards the Romantic and idealistic representation of nature as the exclusive source of Beauty. Baudelaire's polemic is voiced by means of the ironic juxtaposition of the revolting rotten carcass and the forces of nature, depicted through the medium of idyllic expressions similar to 'A un feto' such as, in the third stanza, 'Le soleil rayonnait' and 'la grande Nature'. While Baudelaire subtly and figuratively demystifies nature, Classical beauty, and the Romantic representation of the mistress, Praga is openly argumentative: the Baudelairian contrast of natural beauty and human ugliness is incorporated into a broader polemic against science and religion, directing irony – the 'ironia satanica' as described by the speaker (l. 137) – principally towards Catholicism<sup>132</sup> and the debunking of easy sentimentalism and the Romantic illusion of immortal love. As if Praga did not want to conclude the poem on a macabre and ironic note, however, he eventually overturns the demystifying ending that characterises not only 'Une charogne' but also 'Lezione d'anatomia'. In a similar manner to 'Suicidio', examined in Chapter II.1.5 in conjunction with 'Une martyre', Baudelaire's apparent yet sarcastic spiritual sublimation of death, namely the 'forme et l'essence divine' of the decomposing body of the mistress that the poet keeps with him once she is dead, is taken literally by Praga. This puts into question the genuineness of the ironic juxtapositions, controversial passages, and shocking

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<sup>132</sup> The Latin epigraph to the poem taken from the Gospel of John (PP, p. 152), by means of which Praga wants us to consider the deformed foetus as the manifestation of God's work, is undoubtedly sarcastic.



purposes in ‘A un feto’: the poet affirms that ‘l’orribile mio canto / posso mutare ancor’ (ll. 159-160), subsequently reiterating the natural beautification of mummies and vials that occurs in the third stanza (ll. 161-168), and ultimately concluding the composition with the idealistic image of the souls of deceased children, flying like birds:

Come una freccia argentea,  
dalla mesta vetrina,  
la man sottile e candida  
dell’etica bambina  
parea segnar nell’aria  
qualche invisibil cosa:  
spirti color di rosa,  
ali spiegate al vol! (ll. 169-176)

From what we have seen thus far, it appears that the loss of faith in religion that Praga displays in numerous compositions of ‘Vespri’ and ‘Mezzenotti’, such as ‘A un feto’ but also ‘Nox’ (PP, pp. 126-131), in which the refusal of Catholicism entails a continuous yet futile search for God (ll. 12-14) and the discovery of doubt and pain (ll. 43-63), not only marked, in Praga’s eyes, the impossible return to a youthful and pure ideal (the ‘giovinetta idea’, l. 21). On the contrary, and perhaps more importantly, it also precluded him any convincing and long-lasting access to beauty, leaving only the remnants of a struggle in the form of the brief portraits of cheerful and carefree moments of the ‘Meriggi’ section. These portraits of ‘Meriggi’ still feature some positive references and appeals to God, which demonstrates, I think, that Praga’s antireligious (and profoundly anticlerical) polemic is directed towards a powerless and weak Catholicism in inexorable decadence, which, confronted with the unrelenting progress of science and modernity that instilled him with doubt and uncertainty over the existence of a Catholic God, did not manage to

respond appropriately. Hence the religious argument throughout *Penombre* and, in ‘Preludio’ (PP, pp. 83-84) – the first poem of the collection and its veritable preface – Praga’s fervent expressions denoting: the repudiation of the ‘musa bianca’, that is, religious ideals in poetry (ll. 9-10); the passionate dispute with Manzoni, the ‘Casto poeta che l’Italia adora’ whom the speaker (metaphorically?) wishes to die (ll. 13-15); the poets of Scapigliatura seen as the Antichrists, since ‘Degli antecristi è l’ora! / Cristo è rimorto!’ (ll. 15-16); and, most prominently, the incapacity to reach the ideal by means of the Baudelairian metaphor of flight that we have already seen above in ‘La libreria’ and ‘Elevazione’. On this occasion, the metaphor is employed negatively, juxtaposing the Scapigliati to the image of eagles changing feathers, ‘aquile al tempo di mutar le piume’, struggling to fly (‘svolazziamo muti, attoniti, affamati, / sull’agonia di un nume’, ll. 2-4). With the poetic portrayal of beauty in the materialistic, industrial, scientific, in one word *cynical* mid-nineteenth century almost entirely compromised, Praga turns primarily to the representation of his ‘Ideale che annega nel fango’ (l. 26) of the sections ‘Vespri’ and ‘Mezzenotti’, and of the other elements of despised reality that constitute the poet’s ‘misera canzone’ (l. 31) of *Penombre*.

## 2.5 In Search of Modernity: Towards a Subjective Idea of Beauty

The longing for the ideal, however, remains part of Praga’s poetics throughout *Penombre*. In ‘Preludio’, the poet declares that in the succeeding compositions he shall depict not only the ‘Ideale che annega nel fango’, but also the ‘ebbrezze dei bagni d’azzurro’ (l. 25). If Praga detached himself, for the most part, from the God of Catholicism, he certainly did not try to find beauty in the patriotic notion of

‘homeland’ dear to earlier Italian Romantics. Italy is rarely mentioned in his poetry, and never in a nationalistic or a propagandistic fashion; in the 1873 poem ‘Alla musa II’, from *Trasparenze*, Praga states: ‘Diedi il braccio alla mia patria, / le negai la poesia’ (PP, p. 283, ll. 79-80). What Praga still treasured as part of the feeble idealistic side of his poetry was, if not religious nor patriotic feelings, the beauty of pastoral and maritime landscapes and of natural objects such as flowers, as well as the idea of love and care for the various feminine subjects (in the form of mistress, wife, mother, and grandmother) and for the beloved baby son.

This sense of transiency and insecurity surrounding a traditional vision of beauty in mid-nineteenth century, which included the notions of the spiritual True, the moral Good, love and happiness, and nature, is what probably led Praga to explore, rather originally for the Italian poetic situation of the time, a different path to the ideal. In *Penombre*, Praga attempts to introduce into his poetry, unmistakably in Baudelaire’s wake, an alternative conception of beauty. This idea of beauty does not necessarily deal with the abstract and unchanging (and unchangeable) notions of moral Good, truthful representation, and religious sentiment but, on the contrary, it opens up to a more emotional, sensory, hence personal interpretation of natural and feminine subjects. In the analyses of *Tavolozza*, ‘Meriggi’, and ‘A un feto’ undertaken in this chapter I have demonstrated the significance of Baudelaire’s influence on Praga’s idyllic features linked to nature and the intimate world of familiar (and extra-familiar) affections. On this note, in *Penombre* the lesson of the *Fleurs* is pivotal for another reason: it provides Praga with the aesthetic tools to advance and expand his view of nature and natural objects, containing not merely descriptive and realistic portrayals or Romantic conceptions but also the impressions

and sensations of the poet. Natural elements, seen in this new perspective, come to be used to delineate the poet's personal relationship with the feminine subject(s), occasionally in a debauched and sinful atmosphere. Praga therefore tentatively approaches Baudelaire's idea of modern beauty – and consequently of modernity – as relative and subjective deriving from an intimate (thus not solely spiritual or objective) interaction between the poet and nature, and between the poet and his world of sensory perceptions and feelings. To be sure, in *Penombre* this idea of beauty is limited to specific poems, largely coexisting with a more traditional interpretation of beauty. However, it constitutes a crucial part of Praga's more profound and less evident experimentation with Baudelairean material, which has been mostly overlooked by scholarship on *Penombre* and, significantly, would play an important – albeit different – role in *Fiabe e leggende* and *Trasparenze*.

We have seen that Baudelaire envisages two ideals, one linked to evil and the other, much more traditionally conceived and represented, to the divine. Baudelaire believed that beauty, with its look both 'infernal' and 'divine', depended entirely on one's personal sensibility, and could be found, therefore, in any aspect of reality, whether virtuous or vicious, noble or terrible, good or bad. Although there were subjects that were clearly impossible to idealise through nature, religion, or love (we have seen this in several instances with the carcass of 'Une charogne'), the purpose of art was to beautify things in a manner that nature, religion, and love could not, artificially extracting beauty from those very subjects and, by doing so, conveying the artist's own personality.

It is plain, instead, that for Praga artistic beauty, essentially *human*, cannot be superior to a *divine* natural beauty, with the result that a work of art cannot be more

beautiful than the original subject, and the artist's brush or the writer's pen can only expect to channel, through the medium of his personal skills and individual sensibility, the poetic beauty found within nature. Praga asserts this in his article dedicated to 'L'esposizione di Belle Arti' published on 22 September 1865 in *Il sole*, in which he also cites Baudelaire's 'Bohémien en voyage'. While defending the progress made in landscape painting in the past decade by artists that managed to convey the beauty of the natural subject as a whole, including its different sensory characteristics not solely linked to sight such as the 'aria pura', the 'fragranze', the 'fronde screziate dal sole', and the 'respiro monotono di quelle bestie che sudano rassegnate',<sup>133</sup> Praga lashes out at those painters who, in previous years, embellished and exaggerated nature, making it more beautiful or elaborate than it actually was. Praga criticises 'Le vedute (come le chiamavano) le scene teatrali, tutta quella natura di convenzione fabbricate da artisti che si credevano in diritto di rivedere e correggere l'opera del Creatore', namely 'quest'arte pretensiosa, e meschinella che pettina e lecca ed unge e *abbellisce* la natura, come se la fosse una povera damuccia invecchiata ed inferma'.<sup>134</sup>

Needless to say, Praga's stance on art and nature as described above stands opposite to the aesthetic attitude taken by Baudelaire in his poetic and critical writings of the 1850s and 1860s. Baudelaire believed that art, being a product of the 'surnaturalisme' of the artist,<sup>135</sup> was superior to nature and that nature, occasionally representing the wicked and ugly aspects of reality, could be embellished, improved, and ultimately reformed by means of the work of art. Beside the abovementioned 'Éloge du maquillage' from *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*, Baudelaire exposes this

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<sup>133</sup> 'L'esposizione di Belle Arti', p. 9.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> See the essay 'Exposition universelle, 1855', OC II, p. 596.

view in the 1857 prose poem ‘L’Invitation au voyage’, part of the collection *Le Spleen de Paris*. Here Baudelaire describes a beautiful ‘pays de Cocagne’ full of treasures where ‘tout est riche, propre et luisant, comme [...] une splendide orfèvrerie, comme une bijouterie bariolée’. This fictional country is ‘supérieur aux autres, comme l’Art est à la Nature’; nature is there ‘réformée par le rêve, où elle est corrigée, embellie, refondue’ (OC I, p. 302). Other similar expressions include the famous scornful tirade about natural landscapes and the ‘légumes sanctifiés’ (letter to Fernand Desnoyers of 1853-1854, Corr. I, p. 248), as well as the idea that ‘La nature ne fait que des monstres’, featuring in ‘Notes nouvelles sur Edgar Poe’ (OC II, p. 325). Nevertheless, Baudelaire’s position with respect to nature, the ‘rivale toujours victorieuse’ with which the artist loses the duel about the ‘étude du beau’ (‘Le Confiteor de l’artiste’, OC I, pp. 278-279), eventually results in ambivalence and contradiction, not only when comparing the 1840s poems of the *Fleurs* to those in the same collection written in the two later decades, or to the prose poems, but also when examining the critical writings completed in the 1850s-60s, such as the aforementioned articles on Hugo (see note 60 above) and Wagner (see Chapter II.1.3).

Praga’s moral and conceptual attitude to nature does not fluctuate much in his poetic work, let alone from *Tavolozza* to *Penombre*. It is straightforward and never ambiguous: nature is the image of the divine, symbolising God’s omnipotence, fairness, and beauty. Whether as a subjective memory or as an actual landscape, in Praga’s work nature denotes the place that the poet invokes (and evokes) in his search for tranquillity, purity, and the divine (occasionally one and the same thing), and the sense of liberation that the poet feels in close contact with nature is often

opposed to the strictness and hypocrisy of Catholic principles. The idea of divinity that Praga seeks in nature is, therefore, not the God of Catholicism, a religion burdened with the ‘fisime / delle superbe scuole, / e i pulpiti, e le stole’ that the speaker strives to forget (‘Nox’, PP, p. 130, ll. 131-133). On the contrary, Praga’s vision of the divine in nature is far less complex and, even in Praga’s last two collections, more related to a pantheistic (and occasionally panicky) interpretation. In *Penombre*, Praga often associates a religious vocabulary with the depiction of nature, for instance when in the third section of ‘Domus-mundus’ he speaks of the ‘Iddio / senz’occhi e senza trono’ (PP, p. 169, ll. 29-30) and the natural altar of worship that the speaker finds ‘in mezzo alla campagna’ (ll. 25-28), and of the ‘pianura / benedetta da Dio’ and the ‘rime e i fior della natura’ (PP, p. 168, ll. 5-7); or when he mentions the ‘dolcezza’ of the ‘Sacra natura’ in the fourth part of the same poem (PP, p. 170, l. 13); or even when he declares that posterity will reject Catholicism, its rites and churches in order to worship nature ‘sotto i sereni immensi’, and will hence be considered as the veritable ‘prete della natura’ and ‘del bello eterno apostolo’, in ‘Imbiancatura’ (PP, p. 141, ll. 105-112).

What changes significantly from *Tavolozza* to *Penombre*, and less considerably from *Penombre* to *Fiabe e leggende* and then *Trasparenze*, is the capacity of the poet to employ nature to express more than simple visual beauty, and this change occurs, most notably, when Praga starts to experiment with specific poetic devices and techniques linked to the personal experience of the poet, in particular perceptions originating from various sensory spheres. Baudelaire is, once again, the great catalyst of Praga’s evolution. If in *Tavolozza* the latter was influenced largely by Baudelaire’s Bohemian, Platonic, pantheistic, and Romantic

features, with one clear exception being the synaesthetic dance of music and natural fragrances of 'Il poeta ubbriaco', commencing from *Penombre* Praga broadens his interpretation of nature, embracing the Baudelairian practice of analogical correspondence.

From *Penombre* onwards, Praga realised the artistic potential of a more profound connection between nature and the human being or, more precisely, between nature and the artist as the only possible translator or decipherer of its deepest secrets, including its obscure language, specifically for the lesser man (namely the average bourgeois reader); he came to realise, following Baudelaire, that a more accurate depiction of the relationship between human being, nature, and beauty lay in the 'actual literary devices of analogy'.<sup>136</sup> It is not difficult to spot, throughout Praga's work, terms and expressions depicting the poet as the sole veritable interpreter of nature, which are undoubtedly Baudelairian. Yet scholarship on Praga has pointed only to *Fiabe e leggende* and *Trasparenze* as the collections in which Praga manages to represent the artist as the listener of the 'più commosse e alte voci della natura delle quali il poeta [...] può, senza prevaricare, considerarsi fedele interprete',<sup>137</sup> disregarding much of Praga's treatment of topics correlated to a subjective vision of nature in *Penombre*. Admittedly, it is plain that the specific subject, imagery, and tone underlying the whole of 'Paesaggi', the last section of *Fiabe e leggende*, originated from Baudelaire's 'Correspondances', as Mariani and Carnazzi, among others, have pointed out.<sup>138</sup> See, for instance, the idea that the human being passes through the 'immensi boschi', not listening nor observing

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<sup>136</sup> Leakey, p. 229.

<sup>137</sup> Mariani, p. 280. See also Nardi, *Scapigliatura*, pp. 130-138.

<sup>138</sup> *Storia della Scapigliatura*, p. 276; "Les Fleurs du mal" e la poesia di Emilio Praga', p. 40.



(‘senza tender l’occhio e alzar le ciglia’),<sup>139</sup> hence not understanding whether the ‘suono’ that the anthropomorphic trees ‘espandono / sia rantolo o sospiro’, to wit the ‘sovrumano eloquio / della natura queta’ or, to rephrase it, the ‘eloquenza inenarrabile / [...] filo arcano, incomprensibile, / che lega l’aria al loto’ and ultimately unifies the various components of the natural picture.<sup>140</sup> Now, compare this passage to the first two quatrains of ‘Correspondances’:

La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers  
 Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;  
 L’homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles  
 Qui l’observent avec des regards familiers.

Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent  
 Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité,  
 Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté,  
 Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent. (OC I, p. 11, ll. 1-8)

Noteworthy is the fact that, contrary to what Mariani claims,<sup>141</sup> the final image of ‘Paesaggi’, whereby the poet is defined as the ‘interprete [...] di quel verde mister’ (PP, p. 275, ll. 9-10), as the only one capable of comprehending the unintelligible language of nature, is not drawn from Baudelaire’s idea that the everyman (‘L’homme’) can perceive (but not decipher) the ‘confuses paroles’, as described in ‘Correspondances’. This last part derives from another composition, one that has been shown as strongly influencing Praga and that in the *Fleurs* precedes ‘Correspondances’, that is to say ‘Élévation’. Here Baudelaire writes, in stark contrast with the previous image of the human being strolling among the enigmatic natural symbols of ‘Correspondances’, that the poet (indeed superior to the everyman) ‘comprend sans effort / Le langage des fleurs et des choses muettes’

<sup>139</sup> ‘Paesaggi II’ (PP, p. 263, l. 16; p. 264, l. 42).

<sup>140</sup> ‘Paesaggi V’ (PP, p. 269, ll. 7-8; PP, p. 270, ll. 15-20).

<sup>141</sup> *Storia della Scapigliatura*, p. 280.

(OC I, p. 10, ll. 19-20). The very peculiar phrase ‘language of flowers’ would be reprised by Praga in ‘Alla Musa III’, from *Trasparenze*, in which the poet makes a reference to the concepts of inter-sensory transposition and the association of different senses (sounds and colours) that Baudelaire advances in ‘Correspondances’: the muse teaches the poet ‘il blando linguaggio dei fiori / e i miti dei colori’ (PP, p. 285, ll. 23-24). This demonstrates Praga’s comprehension of the relation that Baudelaire established between ‘Élévation’ and ‘Correspondances’, which delineates the special abilities that, compared to the other human beings, only the poet has to properly understand nature. Together with Carnazzi, we can certainly say that in some sections of *Fiabe e leggende* and *Trasparenze*, such as ‘Paesaggi’ and ‘Calendario’, we are ‘in quel cerchio di trasposizioni e di analogie limpidamente definito nelle baudelairiane *Correspondances*’, which according to Carnazzi, who follows the prevailing reading of Praga’s work, ought to be considered as exclusive to Praga’s last two poetic collections.<sup>142</sup>

On the contrary, I would argue that all of these Baudelairian expressions linked to the poetic treatment of nature in *Fiabe e leggende* and *Trasparenze* retrospectively shine a light on the many instances throughout *Penombre* in which the poet courageously experiments with a subjective and unusual representation of nature, whether to draw a subtle connection between natural landscapes and the emotions of the poet, such as in ‘Marzo’ and ‘Ottobre’, or, more significantly in Praga’s work, to convey sensory perceptions related to natural elements. By investigating the relationship between *Penombre* and Praga’s last two collections more closely, we realise that the prevailing interpretation of Praga’s relationship with

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<sup>142</sup> ““Les Fleurs du mal” e la poesia di Emilio Praga”, p. 40.

nature cannot be considered to be entirely accurate. If in *Fiabe e leggende* and *Trasparenze* Praga seems to adapt the lesson of ‘Correspondances’ more comprehensively and maturely, using precise references to the theory of ‘*analogie universelle*’ exposed in this poem,<sup>143</sup> in fact he remains bound to the *abstract* and *theoretical* principles presented in the first stanza, almost entirely neglecting the synaesthetic process displayed in the following three quatrains of ‘Correspondances’ and, consequently, not practically applying Baudelaire’s analogical theory as extensively or profoundly as he does in *Penombre*. In this work, Praga not only realises the importance of a more profound connection between the human being and nature, but he also experiments with rhetorical figures that convey Baudelaire’s idea of *analogical* nature as ‘Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent’. It could also be pointed out that ‘Marzo’ and ‘Ottobre’, although included by the editors of Praga’s poetry until the late 1960s only in the posthumously published *Trasparenze*, were originally part of the first edition of *Penombre* and then arbitrarily excluded from this collection after Praga’s death, as Mario Petrucciani has demonstrated.<sup>144</sup>

The idea of poetry that incorporates perfumes, colours, and sounds, combined together as part of the ‘profonde unité’ of nature or in active interaction between each other through the medium of synaesthesia, where a semantic transposition of impressions from one sensory domain to another occurs, can be found in various poems of the *Fleurs*. As shown in Chapter II.1.7, in ‘Harmonie du soir’ and ‘Parfum exotique’ natural scents and instrumental or vocal music are coupled in a subjective and arbitrary fashion, be it the ‘Valse mélancolique’ composed of fragrances of flowers and the sound of a violin, or the exotic perfume of the ‘verts tamariniers’ that

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<sup>143</sup> See also Baudelaire’s letter to Alphonse Toussenel, dated 21 January 1856, analysed in Chapter II.1.7.

<sup>144</sup> ‘Nota filologica’, in PP, p. 389.

is merged, in the poet's ecstatic soul, with the song of the sailors. Similarly, in 'La Chevelure' (OC I, pp. 26-27) the inebriating scents of the mistress' head of hair are natural and exotic, being constituted 'de l'huile de coco, du musc et du goudron' (l. 30), and the sensual head of hair is metaphorically defined as 'forêt aromatique' (l. 8). With an image that recalls the inter-relation between senses of 'Correspondances' (but also of 'Parfum exotique', which precedes 'La Chevelure' in the *Fleurs*), Baudelaire affirms that the head of hair is 'Un port retentissant où mon âme peut boire / À grands flots le parfum, le son et la couleur' (ll. 16-17), whereby the speaker figuratively 'drinks' the various sensory (and indeed sensual) features of the mistress.

The most significant illustration of synaesthesia, however, is to be found in the second half of 'Correspondances'. The theoretical formulation that characterises the first two stanzas of this sonnet is subsequently put into practice, in the two concluding tercets, by means of figures of speech emphasising inter-sensory transfer:

Il est des parfums frais comme des chairs d'enfants,  
Doux comme les hautbois, verts comme les prairies,  
– Et d'autres, corrompus, riches et triomphants,

Ayant l'expansion des choses infinies,  
Comme l'ambre, le musc, le benjoin et l'encens,  
Qui chantent les transports de l'esprit et des sens. (OC I, p. 11, ll. 9-14)

Scents, according to Baudelaire, can have qualities normally perceived by other senses, that is to say, they can also be 'fresh', 'sweet', and 'green', as well as being able to 'sing'. These analogies between 'Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons' are to be considered as entirely personal and subjective, for they are interpreted as such by the poet: although Baudelaire is discussing natural fragrances that represent nature's – as well as sensory – unity, these scents have a strong connection with things that

are not natural but human or human-made, such as the coolness of the flesh of babies or the melodiousness of oboes. Therefore, natural perfumes can be employed to aesthetically express the sensations perceived by the poet's 'soul' and 'senses', in which nature reflects, through the synaesthetic analogy, the experience of the human being.

In a passage of 'A un feto' quoted above, Praga advanced the idea of the union of different sensory perceptions, analogous to that previously expressed by the poet in 'Il poeta ubbriaco'. In the lines 'piovean cadenze e balsami / di fiori e di canzoni', Praga is voluntarily imprecise regarding the very essence of these vocal music and natural fragrances, as if 'rhythms' and 'scents' could be linked arbitrarily with either (or even both) the phrases 'of flowers' and 'of songs', entirely depending on the reader's subjective interpretation, and hence creating a comprehensive (and very effective) image that fuses sounds with scents. The intermingling of sounds and scents is particularly valued by Praga, as demonstrated in other poems of *Penombre*. In 'Canzoniere del bimbo II', the poet wishes to write about the 'dolce miracolo' that is the birth of his son; this ecstatic and blissful moment, which the poet wants to translate poetically into a thought 'bello e leggero', can be depicted only by means of the muse (that is, poetry) that synaesthetically 'says' exclusively vegetal (and musical) 'notes' and, once again, 'fragrances' of flowers: 'la musa non dica / che note di spica / che effluvii di fior' (PP, p. 109, ll. 5-12). (Noteworthy is the choice of the term 'notes' instead, for example, of the more neutral 'sounds', as though the ear of wheat is considered as a sort of musical instrument). Praga also associates scents and colours in *Penombre*, such as in the opening of 'Esequie', part of the section 'Mezzenotti', in which in the poet's personal vision one sensory impression can

directly and subjectively evoke another, and a basket of scented flowers can stimulate his aesthetic palette of colours, as if his purpose were to use the colours on his poetic palette as a painter does: ‘O mio canestro di olezzanti fiori, / tavolozza di forme e di colori’ (PP, p. 204, ll. 3-4).

In Praga’s representation of the inter-relation between different sensory features, flowers, plants, and trees are amongst his preferred images; this is a result of his fascination for, most notably, the imagery displayed in Baudelaire’s ‘Harmonie du soir’, ‘Élévation’, and ‘Correspondances’. The first stanza of ‘Monasterium’ includes many elements that peculiarly characterise these three Baudelairian compositions:

Quando il mesto tramonto  
empie di lunghe striscie d’oro il cielo  
e la campagna di confusi suoni;  
quando la danza del leggiadro stelo,  
sommessamente,  
dice di aprirsi al fiorellin notturno. (PP, p. 135, ll. 1-6)

The most likely source of this passage is ‘Harmonie du soir’, from which Praga draws various features, adapting them to his portrayal of a pastoral sunset. First of all, there is the connection between sunset and a strong human emotion, sadness, by defining the sunset itself as ‘sad’ due to the colours of the sky and the sounds of the countryside, as in the following excerpt from ‘Harmonie du soir’: ‘Valse mélancolique [...] Le ciel est triste et beau [...] Le soleil s’est noyé dans son sang qui se fige’ (OC I, p. 47, ll. 7-8, 12).<sup>145</sup> (And we have seen how this last line has been passionately quoted by Praga in his letter to Boito in order to convey his grief for Baudelaire’s death). Secondly, the broad portrayal of a sunset that involves different

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<sup>145</sup> This Baudelairian passage would be remembered also by Verlaine when depicting, in the poem ‘Soleils couchants’, ‘La mélancolie / Des soleils couchants’. *Œuvres poétiques complètes*, ed. by Y.-G. Le Dantec and Jacques Borel (Paris: Gallimard, ‘Bibliothèque de la Pléiade’, 1962), p. 69.

senses – the Baudelairian nightfall comprises melancholic sounds, perfumes, as well as the red colours of the setting sun and, similarly, Praga's dusk fills the pastoral scene with golden colours and obscure sounds. Lastly, the unusual image of the dance of the flower stem, which plainly originates from the 'fleur' that, 'vibrant sur sa tige' (ll. 1-2), emanates its odours that participate in the multi-sensory waltz, but that is here modified by Praga into a talking (or maybe singing?), and not aromatic, flower. It is indeed possible that Praga also remembered the 'couleurs' that Baudelaire links to the 'image d'un ballet de fleurs', in 'À celle qui est trop gaie' (OC I, p. 156, ll. 9, 12).

The idea of talking flowers leads us back to the principles expressed in 'Correspondances' and 'Élévation'. The image of the 'confusi suoni' coming from the countryside is unmistakably similar to the 'confuses paroles' of the Baudelairian symbolic forests in 'Correspondances'. In 'Monasterium', in fact, the enigmatic natural sounds seem to be a language: the flower stem speaks, by means of the dance ('la danza') and quietly ('sommessamente / dice') to another flower, and this monologue is evidently understood by the poet ('di aprirsi al fiorellin notturno'). It seems to me that this floral dance, alongside the other obscure sounds of nature that the everyman cannot comprehend, was considered by Praga as the veritable 'langage des fleurs et des choses muettes' that only the poet deciphers and interprets, a sort of synaesthetic language variously expressed, in turn or simultaneously, by the visual movements and colours of natural objects (such as flowers or the sun), floral fragrances or, correspondingly, the sound produced by trees and plants. It is hardly difficult to compare these 'confusi suoni' to the sound that the trees emit in

‘Paesaggi V’, the ‘rantolo / o sospiro’ that is, in actuality, composed of muffled words, being the ‘eloquio / della natura queta’.

The influence of ‘Correspondances’ and, above all, ‘Élévation’, is evident also in the fantastical and Gothic seventh stanza of ‘Monasterium’, more specifically in the surreal conceit that vocal melodies (the ‘melodie dei postumi lamenti’, PP, p. 137, l. 63) come out in the ‘frescura notturna’ (l. 73) to *drink* rays of light and winds (‘escono, forse a bever raggi e venti’, l. 62). In ‘Élévation’, Baudelaire specified that in the ‘air supérieur’ the poet’s spirit *drinks* (‘Et bois’) sunrays and pure air (‘Le feu clair qui remplit les espaces limpides’, OC I, p. 10, ll. 10-12), as already shown in Chapter II.1.3 when analysing a similar image in Praga’s ‘Elevazione’. This synaesthetic image is frequently used in the *Fleurs*, for instance in ‘Le Balcon’, where the poet recounts the time when he used to drink his mistress’ breath (‘je buvais ton souffle’, OC I, p. 37, l. 18), or in the aforesaid passage from ‘La Chevelure’, where the poet’s soul can ‘boire / À grands flots le parfum, le son et la couleur’.

One of the best examples of Praga’s poetic application of Baudelaire’s analogical doctrine is, without any doubt, ‘E teco errando...’, written in the strophic technique defined as *strophe encadrée*, often employed by Baudelaire. This poem expresses, by means of natural and religious images loosely and subjectively linked by their sensory interaction, the euphoric state of the poet while wandering around with his mistress:

E teco errando, pallida Sofia,  
come una chiesa, era piena di squilli  
l’anima mia;  
come una selva era piena di trilli  
l’anima sacra alla malinconia!  
Errando teco, pallida Sofia.



Vi cantava la messa un cherubino,  
e vi nascean colombe ed usignuoli:  
oh il bel cammino,  
fra le intatte bianchezze e i dolci voli!  
Oh effluvii, oh grazie del pane e del vino,  
quando canta la messa un cherubino! (PP, p. 92, ll. 1-12)

The spiritual atmosphere surrounding the amorous relationship, structured with the help of a religious vocabulary ('chiesa', 'messa', 'cherubino', and so forth), as well as the sensory impressions figuratively perceived by the poet, to wit sounds ('squilli' and the synonym 'trilli'), colours ('bianchezze'), and scents ('effluvii') that serve to convey the ecstatic sensations caused by the feminine subject, could be easily compared to 'Harmonie du soir'; yet, a more defined parallel can be drawn with 'Correspondances', as Bouffard first grasped in his study. As the scholar has argued, speaking about the second stanza of 'E teco errando...', 'grâce à une correspondance qui n'est pas sans rappeler les synesthésies chères à Baudelaire, le chant des rossignols et la blancheur des colombes évoquent le chant et la blancheur du chérubin et par là même apportent des effluves de pain et de vin bénits'.<sup>146</sup> This, however, is not the sole discernible connection with 'Correspondances'. Another can be found in the quasi-sacred treatment of these correspondences, which entails the analogy between the forest and the religious temple in 'Correspondances' ('La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers') and between the forest and the church in 'E teco errando...' ('come una chiesa'; 'come una selva'). Furthermore, the imagery of the first stanza of this latter poem is also analogous to another Baudelairian composition that, contrarily to 'E teco errando...', describes the poet's distress, namely 'Obsession'. Here, Baudelaire makes a clear (and very personal) analogy

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<sup>146</sup> 'Un disciple de Baudelaire', p. 170.

between woods and churches, or, in other words, between the sounds of the forest and those of the cathedrals with their organs and choruses of psalms that frighten the speaker and resonate in his cell-like heart:<sup>147</sup>

Grands bois, vous m'effrayez comme des cathédrales;  
Vous hurlez comme l'orgue; et dans nos cœurs maudits,  
Chambres d'éternel deuil où vibrent de vieux râles,  
Répondent les échos de vos *De profundis*. (OC I, p. 75, ll. 1-4)

Praga converts this image into positive poetic material, yet preserving the connection between religious terms and the suffering state of the poet that in 'E teco errando...' is eventually sublimated, speaking of his soul 'sacra alla malinconia' within which 'cantava la messa un cherubino' and was full of sounds ('squilli' and 'trilli') like a church and a wood. The anthropomorphic trees of 'Obsession' that 'scream' like musical organs, playing and singing religious psalms, were probably in Praga's mind when composing 'Ancora un canto alla luna', which follows 'E teco errando...' in *Penombre*. Praga writes that the poet perceives the sound of the woodland as if it were a musical 'concert' of the various trees that sing, in fact, with a human voice: 'Betulla e salice, / olmo ed ulivo, / [...] / il tempo è adesso / di dondolare / e di cantare: / il segno è certo, / fuori al concerto!' (PP, p. 93, ll. 17-24). The strong analogy between vocal music and the sound that the trees produce (and that only the poet seems capable to comprehend) is such that Praga describes an entire section of the poem, the following, with a musical terminology that clearly anticipates the 'parole più nuove' of the vegetal (and indeed musical) symphony of Gabriele

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<sup>147</sup> For the subjective association between a Catholic place of worship and the poet's intimate world, see also 'Le Mauvais Moine' (OC I, pp. 15-16). Once again, although an analogous image to the two just mentioned is employed by Praga in 'E teco errando...', these types of similes and analogies that serve to underline the poet's negative feelings are to be found especially in Camerana's poetry (see Chapter III.4).

D'Annunzio's 'La pioggia nel pineto' which, incidentally, is also rhythmically composed of very short verses:<sup>148</sup>

oh senti i cori  
nei sicomori,  
giù per le chine  
che cavatine!  
Di re venuta – no, non saluta  
musica tale! (PP, p. 94, ll. 35-40)

The human element is used by Praga also in his synaesthetic images. In 'Dolor di denti' (PP, pp. 177-178), the first composition of the gloomy section 'Mezzenotti', Praga attempts to oppose the personal sensory interpretation of a natural scenery with distinctive human features to the creative sterility of the poet/painter that is due to the impossible visual reproduction of nature's beauty ('Dio! d'argento son le nuvole... / io non l'ho sul mio pennello', ll. 33-34), as a sort of yearned anaesthetic to his anguish that is not solely psychological but also deeply linked to physical suffering (the 'Dolor di denti' of the title). Surely, the poet is deemed a 'verme putrido d'amor' (l. 40) and, unlike the sparkling natural landscape, his 'cervello' is 'buio' (l. 36). Yet, despite this being the first composition of a supposed hopeless section like 'Mezzenotti', I would argue that the repetition of the following first stanza of the poem as its conclusion, in a manner not dissimilar to the spiritual ending of 'A un feto', expresses Praga's remnants of hope in natural beautification and potential happiness, in this instance entirely related to a subjective and sensory interpretation of the natural landscape:

Nelle eterne solitudini  
ride il sole come un pazzo,  
e le fervide risate  
son di raggi immense ondate;

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<sup>148</sup> *Poesie, teatro, prose*, ed. by Mario Praz and Ferdinando Gerra (Milan: Ricciardi, 1966), p. 210, l. 5.

per le selve e i precipizii,  
lungo i solchi e nelle ville,  
tutto è fremiti e scintille,  
tutto è palpiti e splendor. (ll. 1-8; 41-48)

The sun, bizarrely and surreally personified by means of a simile that likens it to a lonely madman, 'laughs' happily. Praga uses synaesthesia to describe the sun's 'fervide risate', which must be read in a literal manner to mean 'burning laughs', given that they are literally transformed from sound ('risate') to heat and colour ('son di raggi immense ondate'). In other words, the poet personally perceives the extremely hot and bright sunbeams as if they were the intense laughs of a madman. The combination of natural and human images is recapitulated in the ending of the stanza that simultaneously conveys the sounds and colours of nature ('per le selve e i precipizii') and the joyful mood of the human beings who live 'nelle ville', drawing a parallel between the two and eventually expressing the poet's envy for the happiness that surrounds him: 'tutto è fremiti e scintille / tutto è palpiti e splendor'.

The synaesthetic aspect of the human laugh used to represent the various sensory characteristics of the non-human world is extensively depicted in another poem from 'Mezzenotti', namely 'Profanazioni' (PP, pp. 185-186). The theme of laughter is what connects the different anthropomorphic objects represented in the first stanza, gathered in a multi-sensory image that defines laughter as variously constituted of colours, perfumes, and sounds:

Rideva la lampada, dai candidi ceri  
specchiando l'orpello nei lunghi bicchieri;  
la tavola, piena di trilli argentini,  
ridea col profumo dei fiori e dei vini;  
le gonne di seta, nell'ombra compresse,  
con lunghi bisbigli ridevano anch'esse. (ll. 1-6)

Depending on the object, the poet personally interprets laughter in a specific manner: the laughter of the lamp is coloured, being composed of the light of the pure white candles; the combination of silvery sounds (in itself another synaesthesia) and scents of flowers and wines make up the laughter of the table; the silk skirts, hiding in the shadow, emit laughs that are in fact the sounds that they produce while moving around. Synaesthesia is here employed to depict the cheerful atmosphere of the orgy of wine and kisses, with three different women ('Lisa', 'Emma', 'Nina', ll. 7, 9, 11), that the speaker is enjoying – at first glance, these synaesthetic passages could be considered in the same category as the intoxicated and deranged perceptions set down in 'Il poeta ubbriaco'. On this occasion, however, it is not clear whether the poet is inebriated or not, or at least it is not overtly stated: it is, at times, vaguely suggested, with expressions such as 'l'ultimo bacio, coll'ultima tazza, / versato sul crine di un'ebra ragazza' (ll. 13-14). These vague and indefinite expressions, together with the bizarre atmosphere that synaesthesia creates, provides the poem with a figurative signification, not representing *directly* scenes of intoxication and debauchery (as in 'Il poeta ubbriaco') but *indirectly* conveying what the poet perceives through his senses. At the end of the third stanza, this surreal setting becomes utterly fanciful, with the introduction of ghosts in the picture, the 'larve leggiere che andavano a volo', which sing 'i canti del tempo passato' to the poet (ll. 16, 18). The ghosts are to be considered in a metaphorical manner, being prized memories of a pure and innocent past that, compared to the present, possess a completely different kind of pleasure. These memories are all represented by female characters, symbolising things of the past as different as people, objects, sensations, places, and days of the week:

- Rammenti? Rammenti? – dicevano insieme,  
poi tutte mutavano le sillabe estreme:
- Io sono la coltrice del letto infantile...
- E noi siamo le gioie dei giorni d'aprile...
- Son io la locanda dei quieti villaggi...
- Io son la valigia dei garruli viaggi... (ll. 19-24)

The 'profanations' referenced in the title seem, at first, to be related to the idea that these female ghosts of innocent memories, occasionally represented in a religious register, appear during an orgy of passion and debauchery occurring with real women. Confronted with this corrupt subject matter, they are somehow desecrated and, as a result, they cannot be sustained, eventually vanishing: 'Oh angosce, oh trasporti dell'anima mia! / E i sogni sfumavano, la nenia svania...' (ll. 37-38). These memories embody the poet's anguish for an innocent state that he realises to have now lost and substituted with vice and corruption; voluntarily mentioned in a non-finite fashion and loosely (and liberally) placed one next to the other, they become veritable symbols of his yearning for purity in the midst of debauchery, which is, in turn, portrayed with synaesthetic expressions. However, upon a more thorough analysis, it is plain that Praga inverts the traditional conception of profanation that is usually reserved to religious items or places: in fact, in this instance it is the sinful orgy that is desecrated by the appearance of the female ghosts representing purity. As a result of this reversal, corruption and depravity take on sacred characteristics, having now substituted innocence and virtue in the poet's world.

In Chapter II.1.4, we have seen that in 'Larve eleganti', from *Tavolozza*, Praga writes about figurative ghosts that have to be treated as past memories, most likely drawing from Baudelaire's 'Un fantôme'. As regards 'Profanazioni', on a thematic level the closest precedent is 'L'Aube spirituelle' (OC I, p. 46), which is

similarly structured around the juxtaposition of purity and debauchery, spirituality and carnality. Baudelaire's composition features the poet who, described as one of the lost 'débauchés' that dream and suffer (ll. 1, 6), in the wake of the 'stupides orgies' sees the ghost of the 'Déesse, Être lucide et pur' which is, in actuality, a 'souvenir' and, at the same time, the symbol of the poet's search for purity after sin and debauchery (ll. 8-14). Noteworthy is the fact that while in 'Profanazioni' the vision of innocence appears *during* the orgy, and because of that can only be ephemeral and put into sheer contrast with the dissolute acts that continue after the vision, in 'L'Aube spirituelle' it happens *after* and as *a result of* the orgy, which entails that the poet, being finally capable of sustaining the comparison between spirituality and carnality, can appreciate the 'azur' that originates from the 'Cieux Spirituels' even more, however 'inaccessible', and constantly attracts him (ll. 5-7).

From what we have seen thus far, in *Penombre* cross-sensory analogies and the combination of sensory features, most of the time connected to natural elements, are used to emphasise the poet's personal attachment with the subject matter in his search for a more intimate conception of beauty, related to both a spiritual yet very personal love and happiness ('E teco errando...') as well as corruption and vice ('Profanazioni'). In the section 'Mezzenotti', the investigation continues with 'Se tu fossi seduta...' (PP, p. 193), where the poet perceives the mistress' voice as a musical fanfare, before transmuting this very voice-instrumental music into floral scents:

se la fanfara delle tue parole  
 mi profumasse di giranii e viole  
 questo povero petto  
 che sospira all'odor del cataletto... (ll. 7-10)

Ever since Binni's essay on Decadentism, this is the passage that is usually quoted when highlighting the occasional 'illuminazioni di novità' of Praga's poetry, yet speaking more of a general Baudelairian influence rather than indicating specific affinities.<sup>149</sup> The fragrances of flowers and the instrumental music that describe the mistress' voice serve to express the pleasure and ecstasy that the poet would feel if she were with him during his darkest hours ('quando pesa su me l'irrevocabile / odio d'Iddio', ll. 2-3; 'al vuoto del cuor', l. 5), and they are juxtaposed to the odour of the coffin which, conversely, conveys the poet's present sorrow and moral anguish. The poet's personal impression of the words uttered by the mistress as a musical fanfare that becomes perfume is drawn from the last stanza of 'Tout entière', whereby Baudelaire once again puts into practice, through the medium of synaesthesia, the theories expressed in the first two stanzas of 'Correspondances':

Ô métamorphose mystique  
De tous mes sens fondus en un!  
Son haleine fait la musique,  
Comme sa voix fait le parfum! (OC I, p. 42, ll. 21-24)

If Praga's synaesthetic analogy voice-music-perfume is derived from this very passage of 'Tout entière', the metaphor that transforms the voice of the mistress into a fanfare comes from another Baudelairian composition, that is to say from a simile employed in 'Confession' involving the 'note plaintive' made by the lover (OC I, p. 45, l. 19), who is defined as 'claire et joyeuse ainsi qu'une fanfare' (l. 17).

In the passages analysed in this section, Praga goes beyond a traditionally conceived idea of objective beauty, finding a more subjective and ultimately relative side to it by means of a synaesthetic process that finds its origins in the Baudelairian

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<sup>149</sup> *La poetica del decadentismo*, p. 86. See also Mariani, p. 249.



analogical practice as theorised in ‘Correspondances’, often bearing specific references to this and other poems of the *Fleurs*. Indeed, one could argue that in *Penombre* there are images, lines, formal structures, even titles of poems that have even more obvious affinities with Baudelaire’s poetry, some of which we have encountered in this study. Others have been found, for instance, in Praga’s nocturnal picture of the wicked and immoral city in ‘Armonie della sera’, which has been rightly associated with Baudelaire’s urban poems, especially ‘Le Crépuscule du soir’ and ‘Le Crépuscule du matin’.<sup>150</sup> Regarding this last topic we have to note that, despite the thematic similarities, Praga’s view of urban scenery is profoundly different to Baudelaire’s, representing the city with solely negative connotations and starkly opposing it to the beauty of nature: in one of the last poems before his death, ‘A Enrico Junk’, from *Trasparenze*, he would call the city ‘madre di inganni e toshi’, while at the same time yearning for the ‘verdi boschi’ (PP, p. 344, ll. 1-2). Thereby, Praga dilutes Baudelaire’s ambivalent stance towards the modern urban world, that is to say, his ‘tension entre deux “postulations” contradictoires’,<sup>151</sup> fascination and disgust, as displayed in the ‘Tableaux parisiens’.

It is not in Praga’s obvious yet forced and artificial Baudelairism, which certainly forms a conspicuous part of *Penombre*, where we ought to investigate Praga’s images of poetic modernity, but in his personal treatment of Baudelairian material that is adapted and adjusted to his own poetics in order to perform a specific function: expressing the poet’s sensory perceptions, impressions, and sensations. The synaesthetic analogy is, as it has been demonstrated, part of this search of modernity. Signs and indications of Praga’s modern poetic investigation can also be found, of

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<sup>150</sup> See Nardi, *Scapigliatura*, pp. 111-112, 118-119.

<sup>151</sup> Labarthe, *Baudelaire et la tradition de l’allégorie*, p. 452.

course, in his tendency for idealistic introspection and subjective transfiguration of a natural landscape examined in ‘Sospiri all’inverno’, where once again the starting point of Praga’s transmutation of external reality is a Baudelairian poem.

To be sure, other features that mark Praga’s poetic innovations in *Penombre* have been pointed out by scholars. Mariani is right to assert that Praga is at his most innovative when, following Baudelaire, he ‘confonde [...] l’elemento religioso e il profano, il Bene e il Male’.<sup>152</sup> We have already seen several cases in which Praga combines sacredness and profanity, such as in ‘Preludio’, ‘Alla riva’, ‘Larve eleganti’, ‘Noli’, and ‘Profanazioni’; this is a characteristic feature of Boito’s work as well (see Chapter I.2.5), and it would also be treated significantly by Camerana. With respect to this topic, Praga is direct and provocative, openly juxtaposing profane and religious subjects. In ‘Convento ideale’, for example, the poet exclaims: ‘Sarò il padre prior de’ miei peccati’ (PP, p. 191, l. 5). Moreover, in the conclusion of ‘Seraphina’, Praga intermingles eroticism and sacredness, when the poetic subject, a prostitute who died of typhus fever, tells God, who has just welcomed her in heaven: ‘Vuoi ch’io ti doni un bacio, o una carezza?’ (PP, p. 152, l. 108). But the real novelty of ‘Seraphina’ is elsewhere: it is, firstly, in the ‘alliance baudelairienne du désir et de la mort’ emphasised by Bouffard but also by Mariani,<sup>153</sup> and secondly in the sublimation of the carnal act by means of the poetry of stanzas 10-17 (PP, pp. 149-150), where sexual intercourse becomes a true component of poetic beauty and Praga overcomes the dualism good/evil, as Mariani has stated, by merging its contrasting features: the act of physical love is described as ‘il sacro Ver per cui l’idea s’inciela’ as well as ‘la Materia, la divina antica’ (ll. 61-62). In other words,

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<sup>152</sup> *Storia della Scapigliatura*, p. 254.

<sup>153</sup> ‘Un disciple de Baudelaire’, p. 175; *Storia della Scapigliatura*, p. 241.

sexual intercourse transcends its carnal basis and comes to encompass any aspects of reality, eventually taking on unexpected metaphysical features: ‘è la fé d’ogni razza e d’ogni data, / è la vita, è la morte, è l’Infinito!’ (ll. 67-68).

However, amongst all these elements of poetic modernity, in *Penombre* there is a substantial degree of traditional forms and imageries that find their origins in the *Fleurs*, as demonstrated in this chapter with such poems of the section ‘Meriggi’ as ‘Brianza’, ‘Noli’, ‘Memento’, but also ‘Nevicata’ and ‘Sospiri all’inverno’. This idyllic and idealistic side of Praga’s poetry serves ultimately to counterbalance the dark and macabre aspects of *Penombre*, and finds a place even in the gloomiest of the three sections, ‘Mezzenotti’. On this note, it has to be remembered that Praga, Boito, and Camerana wanted to play the role of the *poète maudit*, despised by contemporary society and cursed by life’s misfortunes, thus following the example set by Baudelaire in some of his writings where he commemorates the condition of the accursed artist.<sup>154</sup> That is why Praga concludes *Penombre* with the poem ‘Desolazioni’ where, amongst Baudelairian expressions including ‘un’anima di cento anni’ (PP, p. 206, l. 41) that recalls ‘J’ai plus de souvenirs que si j’avais mille ans’ of ‘Spleen’ (LXXVI), Praga repudiates his very idyllic side, choosing instead the strong image of the child’s coffin as symbol of his poetry and, for himself, a pagan limbo:

Oh baci, oh soli prodigati al bimbo,  
ironie degli aprili e delle madri!...  
Meglio una bara di due palmi, e il limbo  
dei santi padri! (ll. 45-48)

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<sup>154</sup> Beside those already seen in this study, see above all the poems of the *Fleurs* ‘L’Ennemi’ and ‘Le Guignon’ (OC I, pp. 16-17), as well as the introduction ‘Edgar Poe, sa vie et ses œuvres’ to the *Histoires extraordinaires*, where Baudelaire writes the following about Poe: ‘Il y a dans l’histoire littéraire [...] de vraies damnations, – des hommes qui portent le mot *guignon* écrit en caractères mystérieux dans les plis sinueux de leur front’ (OC II, p. 296).

Similar to Boito's 'A Emilio Praga' and 'A Giovanni Camerana', as well as Camerana's 'Ad Arrigo Boito', this poem has to be considered, most of all, as a declaration of the Scapigliati's own rebellious and avant-gardist stance with respect to the nineteenth-century bourgeois and conservative audience. Nonetheless, amongst the dejected subject matter, such compositions of 'Mezzenotti' as 'Dolor di denti', 'Se tu fossi seduta...', 'Esequie', 'Elevazione', and others show glimpses of hope, happiness, and natural beautification, demonstrating that idealistic elements still have a meaningful – and consolatory – function for Praga. As Villa writes, 'Non è un caso che nella fase successiva all'allontanamento da Boito, con le sue poesie pubblicate postume in *Trasparenze*, Praga avrebbe recuperato la sua autentica vena [...] della poesia della natura, e avrebbe riassorbito – non così fece Boito – gli atteggiamenti anticlericali di *Penombre*'.<sup>155</sup> As a matter of fact, throughout his poetry Boito maintains an utter refusal of traditional values, and idealistic and idyllic features serve, ultimately, only to be debunked and demystified. As regards Camerana, while retaining, on the one hand, some polemical characteristics typical of Scapigliatura, on the other hand he focuses on a more profound Baudelairism, which if at first glance appears to be related to Praga's Baudelairian treatment of natural objects, is in fact dedicated to the psychological and not sensory traits of the relationship between human being and nature, as we shall see in the next chapter.

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<sup>155</sup> 'Introduzione', p. 24.



## CHAPTER III

### Cultivating Indefiniteness: Baudelaire's Role in Giovanni Camerana's 'Scapigliatura' Years

#### 1. 'Natura e pensiero': Camerana's Baudelairism before Scapigliatura?

Unlike Boito and Praga, during his life Giovanni Camerana never published a collected edition of the numerous poems he wrote, even though some of them appeared in journals beginning in the mid-1860s, occasionally anonymously signed with a 'Y'. This was probably due to the fact that he, privately a poet and publicly a magistrate, did not choose literature as a profession, unlike Boito and Praga; but, above all, he thought that openly publishing a volume of poetry was ill-suited to a magistrate, who had to be rooted in reality and not in reveries, supposedly going as far as to say that 'magistrato e poeta sono due termini incompatibili', as Corrado Corradino reported in his post-mortem homage to Camerana written in July 1905.<sup>1</sup> And yet the latter considered poetry as much more than just a hobby, or a pastime: behind the bourgeois façade that his civic and moral duty forced him to wear, he believed that he was 'nato poeta'<sup>2</sup> and because of his profession the love for poetry was an illicit one: 'I miei amori con la poesia sono amori illegittimi'.<sup>3</sup> Born into a family of magistrates and soldiers, his professional path was already chosen for him, which he reluctantly accepted. Camerana voiced his indisposition towards his job

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Gilberto Finzi, 'Biografia', in CP, pp. xxiv-xxv. Originally published in *Il Campo*, 9 July 1905.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Finzi, p. xxv. See also the poem 'A Giuseppe Giacosa', dated July 1875, where Camerana writes: 'Nacqui poeta, e guai a chi la tocca / La mia corona' (CP, p. 125, ll. 53-54).

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by Finzi, p. xxv.

(alongside an unconcealed preference for poetry and painting) in several instances,<sup>4</sup> and these profound issues are generally considered to have been a major factor in his tragic suicide, which occurred in 1905.

Camerana began writing poetry at a very early age, probably around 1860, when he was only a teenager, and continued more or less consistently until his death, copying and re-copying his poems, probably for a potential publication of his collected works that nonetheless never occurred. Before his period with the Scapigliatura movement alongside Boito and Praga, usually restricted to the years 1864-1869, Camerana had already completed dozens of compositions, as Finzi, who edited the most complete version of his collected poems, lets us know.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, of what constitutes Camerana's juvenilia, namely the poems that have been considered as belonging to Camerana's pre-Scapigliatura phase, only the long poem 'Natura e pensiero', composed in 1863, was included in Finzi's collection of Camerana's work. This would have certainly helped track down Camerana's decisive discovery of Baudelaire's poetry that, according to scholarship, was a result of his first encounters with Boito, Praga, and others frequenting the Milanese milieu of Scapigliatura in 1864-1865. That Camerana started to read Baudelaire's poetry only after meeting Boito and Praga appears to have been taken for granted, as it is commonly thought that for Camerana 'L'invito al viaggio baudelairiano era partito da Praga nella stagione scapigliata',<sup>6</sup> as we shall see more thoroughly below.

Recent scholarship has assessed Camerana's youthful poem 'Natura e pensiero' harshly, typically defining it as a Romantic poetic exercise of little

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<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, the two letters written to his friend Giovanni Faldella reproduced by Gilberto Finzi in 'Introduzione', in CP, pp. x-xi, note 1.

<sup>5</sup> 'Introduzione', p. vii.

<sup>6</sup> Ottaviano Giannangeli, *La bruna armonia di Camerana* (Rome: Lacarini, 1978), p. 170.

originality,<sup>7</sup> or as an example of Camerana's juvenile Romantic ideas.<sup>8</sup> Most importantly, 'Natura e pensiero' would be devoid of any features related to either Scapigliatura or Baudelaire, as Michele Dell'Aquila has affirmed: 'Appare chiaro come la matrice letteraria del Camerana, precedente ad ogni contaminazione scapigliata, baudelairiana, decadente, sia proprio qui, in certo paesaggio ed in certo tono aulico aleardiano'.<sup>9</sup> Since Baudelaire's influence on Scapigliatura has been associated mainly with 'maledettismo scapigliato', as we have shown many times in this study, Camerana's Baudelairism would have originated from Scapigliatura and allegedly only be recognisable starting with the poems written in 1864 or, according to some, even 1865. Vincenzo Moretti argues that Camerana's first genuine experimentation with poetic material that has to be categorised as 'maledettismo scapigliato' is to be found in a poem written in June 1864, 'Sul gruppo di Fausto e Margherita dello scultore Tantardini' (CP, pp. 76-77). This composition about the amorous affair between Faust and Marguerite, dotted with expressions emphasising the sexual nature of the affair, would mark 'un radicale mutamento tematico e tonale', being a poem 'di ascendenza già decisamente scapigliata' deriving from 'le nuove esperienze del poeta: lo *shock* di lui, benestante provinciale benpensante, a contatto col maledettismo scapigliato'.<sup>10</sup> Boito and Praga, therefore, would have been the intermediaries between Camerana and Baudelaire, and between a literary tradition and a longing for modernity epitomised (yet only timidly expressed) by Scapigliatura itself: 'Boito è il mediatore della sua [di Camerana] consapevolezza teorica, Praga del suo pratico muoversi, gestire; Giovanni gli consegna il suo vecchio

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Gilberto Finzi, 'Note ai testi', in CP, pp. 289-290.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Giannangeli, pp. 4-5.

<sup>9</sup> *La poesia di Camerana* (Bari: Adriatica, 1968), p. 36.

<sup>10</sup> 'Giovanni Camerana: la donna, la madonna, l'idolo', in *Scapigliatura e dintorni: ottocentisti minori e minimi verso il Novecento* (Milan: Lampi di stampa, 2005), p. 55.



Faust, ne riceve uno adeguato ai tempi, che è Baudelaire, o uno stimolo a Baudelaire'.<sup>11</sup> It is not known precisely when Camerana began mingling with Boito and Praga – the first actual evidence of their intellectual and artistic association is Camerana's poem 'A Emilio Praga', written in June 1865 in Milan before moving to Turin some time later in that year. Camerana, whose family was from Piedmont, had been living in Milan since 1860, frequenting various cultural institutions and literary cafés of the city.<sup>12</sup> What we know for sure is that in 1863 Boito and Praga joined forces to write the theatrical play *Le madri galanti*, first (and only) performed in Turin in March of the same year. According to Gianfranco Contini, the 'Dante Alighieri', a literary and cultural cenacle that would later be the nucleus of the Piedmont offshoot of Scapigliatura, was created in 1863 in conjunction with the production of the *Madri galanti* in Turin;<sup>13</sup> and Salvatore Farina, a friend of Camerana, claimed that Camerana was one of the founders of the 'Dante Alighieri'.<sup>14</sup> Can we assume, then, that Camerana had already met Boito and Praga in Milan in 1863, possibly also being one of the members of the 'Dante Alighieri' that helped to organise the performance of the *Madri galanti* in Turin, and that Boito and Praga introduced him to Baudelaire? This is indeed possible. There are, however, different opinions on the matter: Nardi maintains that the 'Dante Alighieri' was not constituted before 1867-68,<sup>15</sup> and Giorgio De Rienzo, despite arguing that it was

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<sup>11</sup> Giannangeli, p. 27.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Farinelli, *La Scapigliatura*, p. 167.

<sup>13</sup> 'Introduzione ai narratori della scapigliatura piemontese', in *La letteratura italiana: Otto-Novecento* (Florence: Sansoni; Milan: Accademia, 1974), pp. 87-88.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Finzi, 'Biografia', pp. xxiii-xiv.

<sup>15</sup> *Scapigliatura*, p. 207.

definitely established in 1863, claims that Camerana joined the ‘Dante Alighieri’ only much later, between 1867 and ’68.<sup>16</sup>

Either way, here below I shall demonstrate that already in ‘Natura e pensiero’ some clear Baudelairean features and textual borrowings are easily recognisable, and that these constitute, together with specific characters, images, and ideas drawn from other well-known Italian and European authors, the very conceptual and moral centre of the poem. By analysing ‘Natura e pensiero’ I will show, therefore, that Camerana entered his Scapigliatura period already in possession of some knowledge of the *Fleurs*, adapting, in a manner not dissimilar to what we have seen with the young Praga of *Tavolozza*, Baudelaire’s more traditional and ‘Romantic’ characteristics to his own poetic style. It is not a coincidence, I would argue, that in ‘Natura e pensiero’ there are passages that plainly recall not only the *Fleurs*, but also some of the most Romantic and Bohemian sections of *Tavolozza* in which Praga took his cue from Baudelaire’s verse collection. If it is not known whether in 1863 Camerana knew Praga in person, we shall see that at the time of ‘Natura e pensiero’ the former was already acquainted with Praga’s work, perhaps even with material yet to be published which would later appear in *Penombre* (1864) and *Fiabe e leggende* (1869).

Scholars have pointed out the various influences on ‘Natura e pensiero’ (CP, pp. 65-75), from Leopardi and Aleardi,<sup>17</sup> to Leopardi and Foscolo,<sup>18</sup> or Goethe and Shakespeare,<sup>19</sup> and all these authors undoubtedly helped Camerana to refine the poem’s Romantic language, themes, and images. The epigraph composed of a

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<sup>16</sup> Camerana, *Cena e altri studi piemontesi* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1972), pp. 17-18, 147.

<sup>17</sup> De Rienzo, ‘La scomposizione del paesaggio nella poesia di Giovanni Camerana’, in *Camerana, Cena e altri studi piemontesi*, p. 17.

<sup>18</sup> Finzi, ‘Note ai testi’, p. 289. See also Giannangeli, p. 17.

<sup>19</sup> Giannangeli, p. 13.

passage taken from a composition by Aleardo Aleardi leaves little doubt to the tone of the following poem. At first glance, the conception of nature as a charming and all-encompassing creation of God, whose mountain spirits dedicate hymns to its creator (ll. 1-12), that opens ‘Natura e pensiero’ bears a well-defined analogy to Aleardi, who depicted nature in a traditionally Romantic – and certainly religious – manner, hence the epigraph mentioning Aleardi’s ‘frammento / Dell’ inno eterno che Natura manda / Al Creator’. The poetic development of this notion of nature is intertwined with a stance towards it that could be called Leopardian, as ‘il leopardismo è già un’idea della natura (della vita) matrigna’,<sup>20</sup> namely not as a source of happiness and pleasure but existential suffering, although in ‘Natura e pensiero’ Camerana, by means of his religious faith at the time, distances himself from Leopardi’s most nihilistic positions. While these two representations of nature seem to be conceptually different and ultimately contrasting, Camerana manages to combine them together in a composition that anticipates the dualistic structures of his Scapigliatura phase, which allows him to describe the intimate connections between nature, God, and the human being. Nature, and consequently God, is depicted not only as beautiful and great, but also as terrible and frightful. The subsequent meditations and thoughts of the poet (the ‘pensiero’ of the title) triggered by the observation of nature are similarly composed of memories of youthful happiness, now lost and keenly remembered, and persistent moments of sorrow due to the ephemeral human condition in front of the eternity and immensity of nature (ll. 148-201). These moments define the preponderantly sorrowful poem; yet this is directly inspired by the poet’s contemplation of nature (‘E tu nell’ore / Tremebonde e beate

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<sup>20</sup> Finzi, ‘Note ai testi’, p. 289.

[...] innanzi ai vaghi / Ceruli monti', ll. 352-357) which truly opens the path to God ('Forse talvolta con l'ardor dell'alma / Mirasti aprirsi i cieli, ed una voce / [...] Uscirne udisti', ll. 361-366), who is the one that finally idealises the poet's condition by indirectly comparing his laborious and painful work to the necessary suffering of Christ, as shall be shown.

Taking into account these premises, it is not surprising that in 'Natura e pensiero' Camerana draws quite heavily from poems where Baudelaire displays images and ideas that could, at that time, be interpreted as Romantic and Platonic, representing the correspondences between nature, the spiritual world, and the human being, as well as the Promethean role of the poet in modern society: that is to say, 'Correspondances', 'Élévation', 'Bénédiction', and 'Le Soleil'. With only little effort, we can compare the 'confuses paroles' and the 'longs échos qui de loin se confondent / Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité', uttered to the human being by the living and mystic 'temple of Nature' of 'Correspondances', to the 'immortale / Linguaggio' (ll. 78-79) and the 'arcani accenti' (l. 150) of Camerana's spiritual and mysterious nature that communicates things to the poet 'Con eloquente indescrivibil eco' (l. 190), hence forging a 'mistica alleanza, una secreta / *Corrispondenza*' (ll. 142-143, my italic) with the human being, who metaphorically gets drunk on nature's enigmatic words. And, pointing out just two of the many similarities with Praga's Baudelairian treatment of nature, we cannot but notice the analogy between Camerana's oxymoronic expression 'eloquente indescrivibil eco' and Praga's own 'eloquenza inenarrabile' employed to depict nature's language in 'Paesaggi V' from *Fiabe e leggende*, unintelligible to anyone but the poet, or the parallel choice of adjectives of Camerana's 'arcani accenti' and Praga's 'filo arcano, incomprensibile'.

The connection that the poet establishes with nature in 'Natura e pensiero' is, primarily, by means of his thought:

Volando col pensier di nube in nube,  
Di vallone in vallon, di stella in stella:  
Nel sereno dell'aere [...]. (ll. 183-185)

The capacity of thought to fly amongst natural elements in order for the poet to be able to understand nature is the subject of 'Élévation', in which similar terms and expressions to the passage just quoted are widely used. Baudelaire's poet 'comprend sans effort / Le langage des fleurs et des choses muettes' precisely because his 'penses, comme des alouettes, / Vers les cieux le matin prennent un libre essor' (OC I, p. 10, ll. 17-18). If Camerana's vocabulary includes such words as 'nube', 'vallon', 'stella', 'sereno', 'aere', Baudelaire had already written that the poet's spirit and thought – one and the same thing in the poem – fly 'au-dessus des vallées, [...] des nuages' and 'Par-delà les confins des sphères étoilées' (ll. 1-2, 4); his purpose is to 'S'élancer vers les champs lumineux et sereins' (l. 16), in order to go beyond 'les ennuis et les vastes chagrins / Qui chargent de leur poids l'existence brumeuse' (ll. 13-14). Although in 'Élévation' the ecstatic state is not triggered by the observation of a natural landscape, as in 'Natura e pensiero', and entails the metaphorical passing of nature's boundaries (representing earthly sufferings) articulated by the prepositional phrases 'au-dessus' and 'Par-delà', Camerana expresses a similar longing for vertical ascension. This idea of verticality is necessary for the poet to structure the symbolic opposition between low and high, hence between the squalor of life on earth with its troubles and materiality, and the figurative flight towards a divine and cleansing realm. As a matter of fact, if Baudelaire claims that the speaker's spirit flies 'bien loin de ces miasmes morbides'

by means of his thoughts (l. 9), Camerana takes this cue and writes that the meditation provoked by the contemplation of nature ‘oltre il fango de le basse cose / Il [L’uom] solleva e sublima’ (ll. 99-100).

On a thematic level, a work that had a substantial influence on ‘Natura e pensiero’ is ‘Bénédiction’ (OC I, pp. 7-9) where, as we have seen previously, Baudelaire depicts a fundamentally Romantic picture of an antagonistic society in which the poet becomes a Christ-like figure in his earthly sufferings and expectancy of a celestial afterlife for the misfortunes he experienced. An analogous image is portrayed by Camerana in the conclusion of ‘Natura e pensiero’: precisely because of his role as poet among a hostile and foul crowd that causes him anguish, he finally earns a place in a heavenly realm. In spite of some obvious differences, the similarities, lexical and thematic, between the endings of the two poems are striking. In ‘Bénédiction’, the poet, considered as a sacred figure, ‘Vers le Ciel, où son œil voit un trône splendide, [...] lève ses bras pieux’ (ll. 53-54), dedicating the rest of his verses, a veritable benediction, to God who gave the human being pain, described as the ‘divin remède à nos impuretés’ and a ‘noblesse unique’ (ll. 58, 65). And pain is what grants the poet – not merely the speaker, but the poet as a category – his place in heaven, since God saves ‘une place au Poète / Dans les rangs bienheureux des saintes Légions’ (ll. 61-62). In ‘Natura e pensiero’ it is, conversely, God who speaks to the poet, affirming that beyond human perfidy and sorrow there is for the poet ‘un regno illimitato, e quanto / Dell’Eterno il pensiero eterno e puro’ (ll. 370-371). In a similar manner to Praga’s ‘Per cominciare’ from *Tavolozza* which, as we have seen, shares with ‘Bénédiction’ its core topic of the poet loathed by his fellow human beings, Camerana moves the focus of this section from the implications of the poet’s

unspecified suffering which guarantees his place in heaven, featuring in Baudelaire's composition, to the importance of poetry in contemporary society, with the related suffering caused by the poetic process and antagonism of the crowd. That is why Camerana's celestial realm, craved by the poet, is, significantly, poetry itself: 'Poesia è il suo nome. Eccelsa cresce / Ivi una palma [...] e de la Gloria / È la palma famosa' (ll. 372-375). The poet's path to glory is full of obstacles and characterised by public opposition, as 'solo a prezzo di sanguigna lotta / Dall'albero fatale i desiati / Rami corrai' (ll. 379-381). This last image of the tree grown in the realm of poetry from which the poet picks, after a bloody fight, the desired branches of glory is akin to the following passage of 'Bénédiction', where the poet's mother, speaking to God, claims that, since her son has been her 'expiation', she will oppose him and make sure that he will never be successful in the field of poetry, twisting 'cet arbre misérable, / Qu'il [le Poète] ne pourra pousser ses boutons empestés!' (ll. 8, 15-16). On a similar note related to this image of corrupted flowers, right after his mention of the metaphorical tree Camerana writes that poetry is not 'un fior d'allegria, / ma de la zona / Triste del patimento' (ll. 382-383), which is also a probable reference to Baudelaire's idea of his poems as *Fleurs du Mal*.

According to Camerana, a filthy society has cursed the poet, since 'Una d'oltraggi / E di misere insanie acre tempesta / Sue luride quadrella in sul cammino / Del bardo scaglierà' (ll. 384-387). Baudelaire's representation in 'Bénédiction' of the cruelty of vile people (including his mother and his wife) towards the poet is alike: they are 'furieux' (l. 56), making of him the 'essai de leur férocité' (l. 32) by mixing ash and 'd'impurs crachats' in his bread and wine and by tripping him up (ll. 33-36). In both compositions, however, this ferocity does not influence the poet, who has a

strong will and does not change path, taking on Christ-like features and transforming the crowd's hate into its veritable opposite, that is to say love and compassion. Baudelaire speaks of a pilgrimage, a '*chemin de la croix*' (l. 26) happily sung by the '*serein*' poet with '*bras pieux*' and an '*esprit lucide*' (ll. 54-55), who '*veut aimer*' people but is brutally turned down by them (ll. 29-32, my italics); Camerana, employing a similar vocabulary, describes a poet who goes '*Tra le genti insegnando*' and is pitilessly insulted (ll. 384-387), yet this does not swerve him '*Dal pio sentier*' and he '*guarderà il futuro / Serenamente*', singing about '*l'uom, l'amore, il duolo*' and '*la beltà, verbo di Dio*', amongst other things (ll. 388-392, my italics). Camerana also preserves the Baudelairian association between the sanctified image of the poet and his act of blessing: if the title of Baudelaire's poem is '*Bénédiction*', and the poet is depicted as blessing God ('*Soyez béni, mon Dieu*', l. 57), in Camerana God himself claims that close to death the poet will bless his fellow human being, as '*Sovra i fratelli tenderà le palme / Benedicendo*' (ll. 397-398). This last action of the poet who surprisingly blesses the very people that have been unreceptive and aggressive towards him has astonished scholars; Giannangeli, for instance, wondered whether this was a '*Grande contraddizione del Camerana antagonista, che muore benedicendo?*'.<sup>21</sup> However, once we shine a light on the tight relationship between '*Natura e pensiero*' and '*Bénédiction*', particularly with regard to the importance of the theme of suffering and the analogy between the poet and the figure of Christ, Camerana's concluding act of blessing is no longer a surprise.

Other comparable features can be found at the beginning of the two poems, more precisely in the sinful characters of Faust in '*Natura e pensiero*' and the poet's

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<sup>21</sup> *La bruna armonia di Camerana*, p. 16.



mother in 'Bénédiction', demonstrating that Baudelaire's influence at this stage already opens to themes, such as that of blasphemy towards God, which would be a trademark of Scapigliatura. In 'Bénédiction', the mother is 'pleine de blasphèmes' for having given birth to the poet in 'ce monde ennuyé', and she 'Crispe ses poings vers Dieu, qui la prend en pitié' (ll. 2-4), while cursing the night the poet was conceived: 'Maudite soit la nuit aux plaisirs éphémères / Où mon ventre a conçu mon expiation!' (ll. 7-8). Camerana, in this instance, uses similar expressions to depict an image that can be related to Baudelaire's as regards the sacrilegious invective against God, and this latter's pitiful reaction. In 'Natura e pensiero', Faust curses ('E maledisse', l. 26) the many things in life that, according to him, are shrouded in doubt, 'Tutto nel bieco anàtema travolse' (l. 29), including God ('gl'immortali', l. 27), who nonetheless looks down piteously and turns this blasphemous invocation into something utterly different: 'Ma pietoso nel ciel mutolla Iddio / [...] In parola di pianto e di salvezza' (ll. 36, 38).

The last section that bears a well-defined connection to Baudelaire in 'Natura e pensiero' is the hymn to the sun (to the 'sol che splende su le nostre terre', l. 337) that the poet dedicates 'Ai giusti, ai forti' (l. 344), in the last part of the poem (ll. 335-350). The emphasis on the invigorating and supporting powers of the sun, a veritable paternal figure 'Dispensatrice di consigli austeri, / D'instancabil vigor prodiga e speme' (ll. 348-349), can be effortlessly likened to the characterisation of the sun as a fatherly figure in Baudelaire's 'Le Soleil' as well as Praga's 'A un feto', examined in Chapter II.2.4. Unlike Praga's and Baudelaire's compositions, however, in 'Natura e pensiero' worms are considered as accursed, filthy, and corrupted creatures, and are used as a metaphor for the 'spiriti codardi' who are unworthy of

the sun's warmth and energy (ll. 340-344). This demonstrates that a traditional conception of the dichotomies good/evil and beauty/ugliness, where the two notions are entirely separated representing opposite entities, characterises the very essence of Camerana's pre-Scapigliatura period.

It is certainly not a coincidence that Baudelaire's influence on 'Natura e pensiero' can be circumscribed to only four poems of the *Fleurs*, namely 'Bénédiction', 'Le Soleil', 'Élévation', and 'Correspondances'. These were the first four compositions of the opening section, 'Spleen et Idéal', of the 1857 edition of the *Fleurs*, which to an eighteen-year-old poet such as Camerana at the time of 'Natura e pensiero' could, indeed, appear as exemplary poems of an author who in the early 1860s could be easily linked to Romanticism. Camerana's preponderantly Romantic reading of those poems is evident in his treatment of the Baudelairian material: as regards 'Correspondances', for instance, Camerana is interested solely in the idea of a link between a mystical nature and the human being by means of a mysterious language. Consequently, in 'Natura e pensiero' Camerana only takes on the features concerning a vertical correspondence,<sup>22</sup> the unity between the material and the spiritual realm featured in the first quatrain of 'Correspondances', ignoring what Baudelaire considered as the true 'confuses paroles', that is to say the obscure elements that the senses of the human being perceive and that the poet manages to interpret and translate poetically through a synaesthetic process: 'Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent'. What has been deemed as spiritual and vertical correspondence is certainly characteristic of the first quatrain that paints nature as symbolic, yet the last two tercets, exemplifying sensory synaesthesia – hence an

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<sup>22</sup> As Pichois, p. 843, affirms: 'De tradition, on distingue [...] les correspondances des synesthésies. Les premières sont verticales et irréversibles: elles orientent l'homme vers Dieu selon les degrés hiérarchiques d'une spiritualisation'.

horizontal correspondence<sup>23</sup> – eventually shatter the poet’s ‘*élan vertical, détrui[sent] l’ascension vers l’unité*’.<sup>24</sup> In ‘*Natura e pensiero*’, Camerana represents in several instances the connections between God and nature, such as when he refers to the latter as ‘*lampo / De lo spirto di Dio*’ (ll. 269-270), and between nature and the poet: it is symptomatic of Camerana’s Romantic ideas of that time that he considers the ‘*Corrispondenza*’ between nature and the human being as the enigmatic language that the lyrical I understands not through synaesthesia, but as a result of a direct contemplation of nature. In Camerana’s view, nature repeats ‘*Con eloquente indescrivibil eco*’ the poet’s youthful thoughts and sentiments on poetry (‘*O santi, o puri / Desiderii di fama [...]*’), and induces new meditations related to metaphysical knowledge (‘*Ognor compresi che [...]*’, l. 158; ‘*Ma pur compresi che [...]*’, l. 160) about the greatness of God and nature (‘*Iddio ben vive!*’, l. 102; ‘*in più eletto albergo / Suo tramite compir l’uom non potea*’, ll. 158-159) but also about the miserable human condition (‘*funesta sorte / E ineluttabil ogni nato attende*’, ll. 160-161). While, in a similar manner to Praga (and also, more moderately, to Boito), Camerana would retain some features of this Romantic reading of Baudelaire in his Scapigliatura years, beginning with the poems written in 1864 Camerana’s relationship with nature would be more intimate, progressively including fewer metaphysical meditations and more personal emotions and moods, leading him to experiment with a subjective and more anthropocentric interpretation of the natural landscape which, as I shall demonstrate in the next section, begins just after ‘*Natura e pensiero*’.

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<sup>23</sup> ‘*Les synesthésies [...] sont horizontales, faisant communiquer les sens entre eux*’. Pichois, p. 843.

<sup>24</sup> Compagnon, p. 48.

## 2. Interpretation not Imitation: Camerana and the Natural Scenery

If Baudelaire's name does not feature in past academic studies on 'Natura e pensiero', scholarship generally tends to date Camerana's first experiments with Baudelairian material back to his phase in Scapigliatura, traditionally circumscribed between the years 1864-65 and 1869.<sup>25</sup> Scholars, however, have devoted more discussion to the impact of the other writers of Scapigliatura, particularly Praga and Boito,<sup>26</sup> on Camerana's literary training in those years, rather than the actual presence of Baudelairian conceptual, textual, and stylistic borrowings in his poetry, therefore speaking, for the most part, of an indirect Baudelairian influence mediated by the works and guidance of the above authors.<sup>27</sup> It does not help that Camerana's time in Scapigliatura is principally considered to have been formative, transitory, and of little quality or originality,<sup>28</sup> and rather as a sort of preparation for the more mature post-Scapigliatura phase that would begin with the 'Bozzetti' in 1870, which would mark 'un anno spartiacque con due prolifici versanti':<sup>29</sup> one of youth and relative rebelliousness and one of maturity. While it is certainly important to examine the interaction between the texts of Scapigliatura, this approach has led critics to focus almost exclusively on certain poems of 1864-69, that is to say those that bear well-defined links to the aforementioned authors, such as 'A Emilio Praga', 'Ad Arrigo Boito', or 'Emancipazione'.

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<sup>25</sup> See Finzi, 'Introduzione', pp. viii-ix.

<sup>26</sup> There has hardly been a study that has not emphasised Camerana's relationship with Praga and Boito. Cf. Farinelli, *La Scapigliatura*, p. 169.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Petrocchi, p. 22.

<sup>28</sup> See Finzi, 'Introduzione', p. ix, who underlines 'tutti i tic, gli emblemi, i vessilli vistosi e le soluzioni deboli derivate dalla comunione con i milanesi', before speaking of 'quella poetica di transizione nota come scapigliatura'. Cf. also Petrocchi, p. 24.

<sup>29</sup> Giannangeli, p. 4.

That is why in scholarship on Camerana it is commonly assumed that Baudelaire's most profound and unadulterated influence on Camerana occurred later, when, to use Giannangeli's words, Camerana truly 'imbocca una sua via e procede da solo; e sarà anche un procedere da solo [...] il dare una versione autoctona [...] del Baudelaire'.<sup>30</sup> This period of most Baudelairian impact on Camerana is generally thought to have occurred after *Scapigliatura*, although there has been no real common agreement on the actual chronological boundaries. Discussing Camerana's post-1869 poems, Petrocchi states that Camerana's Baudelairian 'ideale agitazione davanti alla vita',<sup>31</sup> which involved a comparable sensibility about feminine figures and dreamlike landscapes, would be constantly represented in Camerana's poetry until the very end, quoting two poems written in the 1880s, 'Note morenti' and 'Il sogno è morto...', as examples of Camerana's Baudelairian and Decadent features.<sup>32</sup> Nardi, on the other hand, proposes the years between 1877 and 1885 as Camerana's supposed Baudelairism, considering Camerana's symbolic representation of nature in those years as deriving from Baudelaire's portrayal of landscapes, while also underlining Baudelaire's stylistic lesson in terms of the musical repetition of words, phrases, and slightly modified expressions.<sup>33</sup> This interpretation was taken up and expanded on by Dell'Aquila, who developed Nardi's idea of a formal influence, combining it with Binni's notorious view of Camerana as a poet who learned from Baudelaire to 'snodare un verso melancolico, fuori dalle misure tradizionali' and the one who 'assimila meglio il tono baudelairiano' in his post-*Scapigliatura* poems.<sup>34</sup> In fact, Dell'Aquila argues that 'la lezione baudelairiana era quella che il poeta più

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>31</sup> 'Sulla poesia di Giovanni Camerana', p. 28.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pp. 26-27.

<sup>33</sup> *Scapigliatura*, p. 194.

<sup>34</sup> *La poetica del decadentismo*, pp. 66-67.

sentiva congeniale in quegli anni dal '77 all'85'<sup>35</sup> which, even though the two poets share analogous topics such as the morbid idolatry of the woman or the representation of landscapes, is mainly a 'lezione di stile, di tono poetico'.<sup>36</sup> Even Giannangeli, who has most attentively studied Camerana's Baudelairian features, sees Baudelaire's genuine influence beginning only after 1869, identifying it with the process of the symbolisation of nature that would progressively invest Camerana's poetry, implicating a specific stylistic method and reaching its climax – and its end – in 1886 with the composition 'Cerco la strofa...'. Even if Giannangeli admits that in Camerana's youthful poems there is a comprehension of Baudelaire's poetic world that is independent from that of the other Scapigliati, this is 'limitata a certi elementi recepibili': Baudelaire's impact at that time would be, ultimately, 'marginale ed episodico'.<sup>37</sup> According to Giannangeli, Camerana's Baudelairism should be investigated, thereby, in his use of the 'poetica degli oggetti e del correlativo oggettivo' in his compositions of the first half of the 1880s, in this 'secondo momento' of Camerana's post-Scapigliatura where 'c'è un racconto *sugli* oggetti, in cui questi offrono la spinta ma si ritraggono in sottofondo tranne a riemergere in vivaci risentimenti nel corso della composizione'.<sup>38</sup> One who did not put chronological boundaries around Baudelaire's influence is Finzi, who asserts that features related to French culture, especially those belonging to Hugo and Baudelaire, 'si intersecano fra di loro non cronologicamente ma poeticamente'.<sup>39</sup> Afterwards, Finzi clarifies his position on the matter, speaking of a 'generica allusività di atmosfera' between Baudelaire and Camerana, and above all reiterating

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<sup>35</sup> *La poesia di Camerana*, p. 59.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>37</sup> *La bruna armonia di Camerana*, p. 170.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>39</sup> 'Introduzione', p. xiv.

the aforementioned idea of a major formal and stylistic lesson, therefore indirectly associating this influence with Camerana's alleged Decadent period after Scapigliatura.<sup>40</sup>

Past scholarship has certainly depicted an interesting picture of the significance of Baudelaire's figure for Camerana after 1869. There is still much to be done, however, with respect to the latter's period in Scapigliatura. In this chapter, I shall demonstrate that not only Baudelaire was already a crucial presence in Camerana's Scapigliatura phase, but also that: 1) certain key elements of the pre-1870 period that can be classified as Baudelairian are idiosyncratic and unique to Camerana, hence not deriving from the other Scapigliati; 2) the treatment of typical Scapigliatura themes and tropes, including the dualistic (and occasionally oxymoronic) depiction of feminine figures and macabre subjects, was not merely aesthetically or artistically rebellious, but bore features that would be central to Camerana's later – and more mature – work. One of these features is Camerana's peculiar representation of nature that, crucially, has well-defined connections to Baudelaire's, in regard to the function of the human element within a natural scene and, vice-versa, of the natural element within the representation of human figures – this relationship between the human being and nature would be a prominent aspect of Camerana's poems after Scapigliatura. Camerana's modernity has typically been associated with his analogical symbolism and the psychological landscapes of his 1880s poems, as well as the even more semantic and visual *indefiniteness* of his 1890s and early 1900s poetics. Whilst emphasising the equivalence between the landscape portrayed and the mood of the poet, scholars have variously spoken, when

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. xvi.

referring to Camerana's post-1869 poetry, of: 'paesaggio – stato d'animo' and 'schietti modi analogici';<sup>41</sup> a tendency towards 'qualcosa di indefinito' and an 'evoluzione psicologica e formale verso il simbolismo';<sup>42</sup> a 'linguaggio delle sensazioni';<sup>43</sup> a 'progressiva scomposizione figurativa del reale'.<sup>44</sup> More recently, similar evaluations have consolidated this Decadent interpretation of Camerana's poetics after Scapigliatura, such as: the consideration of his poetry as being characterised by a 'sovrapposizione di uno stato d'animo particolare ad ogni aspetto della natura';<sup>45</sup> the components of natural landscape seen as 'autentici simboli [...] della situazione del poeta';<sup>46</sup> or, when referring to the poem 'Note morenti', speaking of 'i dati paesaggistici' that 'si affiancano esplicitamente a realtà interiori'.<sup>47</sup> Without attempting to deny the obvious evolution of Camerana's poetry after 1869, I will show that Camerana's modernity begins with Scapigliatura, both with regard to themes related to the 'maledettismo scapigliato' and, perhaps more interestingly, the dialectic between nature and the human being. Camerana's modernity is, at this stage, certainly embryonic and principally (but not solely) on a thematic and conceptual level; yet, it is the very base upon which Camerana's later symbolism and poetic *indefiniteness* shall be cultivated and developed. Remarkably, if on the one hand some elements of Camerana's modernity can be deemed as having its origins in Boito's and Praga's influence, on the other hand some distinctive features of this

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<sup>41</sup> Francesco Flora, 'Giovanni Camerana', in Giovanni Camerana, *Poesie*, ed. by Francesco Flora (Milan: Garzanti, 1956), pp. xxv, xxix.

<sup>42</sup> Finzi, 'Introduzione', p. ix.

<sup>43</sup> Mariani, p. 539.

<sup>44</sup> De Rienzo, 'La scomposizione del paesaggio', p. 46.

<sup>45</sup> Crotti and Ricorda, p. 1537.

<sup>46</sup> Farinelli, *La Scapigliatura*, p. 169.

<sup>47</sup> Vincenzo Moretti, 'Giovanni Camerana: paesaggi d'anima malata', in *Scapigliatura e dintorni*, p. 71.



modernity have unique Baudelairian characteristics that are absent in the poetry of his friends, as this chapter will demonstrate.

While not strictly representing a natural landscape compared to the 1863 ‘Natura e pensiero’, ‘Quando il soave sguardo...’, written in September 1864, shows a significant evolution in Camerana’s treatment of Baudelairian material involving natural elements. ‘Quando il soave sguardo...’ (CP, p. 204) shares several analogies, especially in terms of vocabulary and images, with ‘Élévation’, even though some of its formal features can be likened to another of Baudelaire’s poems, ‘L’Aube spirituelle’. The specific subject of the poem, that is to say the mystical elevation towards a heavenly realm provoked by the speaker’s joyful feelings for his mistress, on the contrary, has well-defined ties to Praga’s ‘Elevazione’ from *Penombre*, which we compared to ‘Élévation’ in Chapter II.1.3. If in Praga’s composition the poet’s paradisiac state – symbolised by references to the ‘angioli d’Iddio’ and the ‘bell’ inno pensato in paradiso’ (PP, p. 198, ll. 5, 9) – is triggered by the act of speaking to the mistress (ll. 1-2), in Camerana’s it is the gaze as well as the sound of the ‘voce celeste’ of the lover that ‘tutto [...] ravviva e imparadisa’ (ll. 2, 4). Yet, in ‘Quando il soave sguardo...’ there are features that can be connected exclusively to Baudelaire’s poems quoted above, ‘Élévation’ in particular. Camerana happily talks about the tenderness of ‘*il mio spirito*’ (l. 3) and, if in ‘Natura e pensiero’ he discussed the poet’s capacity to fly by means of his thought, in this composition he affirms that it is ‘la fantasia’ that ‘*Sen vola al ciel*’ (l. 8), soaring ‘*sopra le region delle tempeste*’ (l. 7), almost entirely detached from the filthy ‘*mondo impuro*’ (l. 5) and free from the ‘*voglie nebulse e infeste*’ (l. 6, my italics). This segment plainly recalls ‘Élévation’ – apart from the general image of the poet’s thoughts (Baudelaire) and

imagination (Camerana) that fly above a polluted and shadowy world, it is the terminology that corresponds closely. After all, Baudelaire employs the following expressions in 'Élévation' (OC I, p. 10): '*Au-dessus*'; '*Par-delà les confins des sphères étoilées*'; '*Mon esprit*'; '*Envole-toi bien loin de ces miasmes morbides*'; '*Derrière les ennuis et les vastes chagrins*'; '*l'existence brumeuse*'; '*les pensers*'; and '*Vers les cieux*' (my italics). Most notably, since the first Romantic experiments with the subject matter of 'Élévation' in 'Natura e pensiero', Camerana's idea of idyllic scenery has definitely changed, switching focus from a love directed to nature to a love towards the feminine subject. The elements of a natural and idealistic portrayal of love are still present in the speaker's action of strolling with the '*angelo mio [...] di stella in stella*' (ll. 9-10) – in 'Natura e pensiero' Camerana had written about flying '*di stella in stella*'. Nonetheless, in '*Quando il soave sguardo...*' Camerana embraces Baudelaire's suggestion of going beyond earth's boundaries, and consequently nature, to find eternal happiness, telling the mistress '*Lasciam la terra*' in order to reach the '*bella | Eterna luce*' (ll. 9, 11-12) – Baudelaire wrote about the '*champs lumineux et sereins*' – and give her '*un bacio tale, / Che terra e ciel non vider mai l'eguale*' (ll. 13-14). To conclude, in '*Quando il soave sguardo...*' Camerana manages to personally adapt – probably with a little help from Praga's composition – the Baudelairian material displayed in 'Élévation', introducing a second human figure to the picture – beside the poet – and with it a typical theme of Scapigliatura, the dualistic depiction of the love relationship, which can imply contrasting feelings of spirituality and desire towards the feminine subject. In addition to the longing for spiritual love, Camerana represents both repulsion and attraction for the pleasure of the senses: repulsion is conveyed by the expressions

‘mondo impuro’ and ‘voglie nebulse e infeste’; and, on the other hand, attraction is embodied in the image of the concluding kiss with the mistress.

This sort of conflicting stance towards physical love is characteristic not only of Scapigliatura. As previously seen in Chapter II.2.5, ‘L’Aube spirituelle’ features the yearning of the poet for a memory of nonphysical and spiritual love, depicted with images of light and verticality and in a religious vocabulary, after a despised carnal act that, nevertheless, is the actual event that triggers the memory of the idealised mistress. We could certainly compare conceptual and lexical affinities between ‘L’Aube spirituelle’ and ‘Quando il soave sguardo...’, such as the ‘stupides orgies’, the ‘Déesse, Être lucide et pur’, or the ‘Âme resplendissante’ (OC I, p. 46, l. 14) of Baudelaire’s poem and Camerana’s ‘voglie nebulse e infeste’, ‘angelo mio’, and ‘bella | Eterna luce’. In this case, the principle influence is, however, to be found on a formal level. Both compositions are, in fact, sonnets, and they both begin with the word ‘when’ in prepositional function: ‘Quand chez les débauchés l’aube blanche et vermeille’; ‘Quando il soave sguardo in me si affisa’. This literary device is frequently employed by Baudelaire at the beginning of a poem and/or a stanza and, less often, as the first word of several stanzas of the same composition, such as in ‘Spleen’ (LXXVIII); as shall be shown shortly, the repetition of ‘when’ in such a manner would profoundly affect Camerana’s formal technique at the time of Scapigliatura. Certainly, we have to point out that Praga also opens the poem ‘Elevazione’, which is, however, not a sonnet, with ‘when’ used as a preposition: ‘Quando ti parlo, come uno sparviero / sono leggero’ (PP, p. 198, ll. 1-2). But there is another clue that reveals the direct link between ‘L’Aube spirituelle’ and ‘Quando il soave sguardo...’. In the former, the first verse of the second quatrain is the

following: ‘Des Cieux Spirituels l’inaccessible azur’ (l. 5). In Camerana’s poem, the beginning of the second quatrain is very similar in tone and starting preposition, namely ‘Dal mondo impuro allor quasi divisa’ (l. 5). Camerana seems to have substituted the religious expression ‘Cieux Spirituels’ with its veritable opposite, ‘mondo impuro’, while depicting a similar image entailing the longing for a superior and celestial realm through the medium of the love for the feminine subject.

The evolution of Camerana’s relationship with nature is evident in the first poem that can be unquestionably associated with Scapigliatura, that is to say ‘A Emilio Praga’, dated June 1865:

Quand’escono dagli stagni e da la fonda  
 Pace de le boscaglie  
 L’alte voci notturne:  
 Quando una bella e strana moribonda  
 Appar la terra, e in sospir lunghi e fiochi  
 E mistiche parole,  
 Sembra che invochi  
 Ancor l’innamorante occhio del sole:

Quando in tremule danze ed azzurrine  
 Vagano sopra i tumuli  
 Le fatue fiammelle,  
 Come un allegro stuolo di sgualdrine  
 Che folleggino in faccia alla sventura. (CP, p. 78, ll. 1-13)

Giannangeli points out the resemblances, regarding poetic structure and setting, with Praga’s ‘Monasterium’, the twenty-fourth poem of *Penombre*, juxtaposing the parallel choice of the preposition ‘Quando’ as the first word of both a series of stanzas and lines within those stanzas, hence speaking of a mere indirect relation with Baudelaire’s ‘Spleen’ (LXXVIII), where the first three quatrains all begin with the preposition ‘Quand’ (OC I, pp. 74-75, ll. 1, 5, 9).<sup>48</sup> Giannangeli also suggests that the pastoral scenery at nightfall is analogous to ‘Monasterium’, before highlighting

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<sup>48</sup> *La bruna armonia di Camerana*, pp. 34-35.

the instances in which Camerana differs from Praga and, therefore, directly and independently approaches Baudelaire, especially in terms of natural objects and terminology. Giannangeli likens, and rightly so, the expressions ‘alte voci notturne’ and ‘sospir lunghi e fiochi / E mistiche parole’ to Baudelaire’s portrayal of nature’s enigmatic words in ‘Correspondances’, as well as the natural elements ‘stagni’ and ‘boscaglie’ to the objects present in ‘Élévation’.<sup>49</sup> Taking into account the differences between Camerana and Praga in the representation of the pastoral landscape and the evident Baudelairean features of ‘A Emilio Praga’, Giannangeli wonders whether ‘Camerana serve pretestuosamente Praga, ma in realtà si consegna a Baudelaire’, before concluding by asserting that ‘mentre Praga degrada e deforma e molto spesso banalizza il modello [...] il Camerana lo medita e rimedita – ora sta verificando questa procedura – fino al punto di cavarne fuori se stesso’.<sup>50</sup> Now, this is surely a legitimate interpretation; yet the matter is, I think, a little more complicated. There is no doubt that in his poem Camerana wants and manages to mimic many formal and thematic characteristics of ‘Monasterium’ and, more generally, of Praga’s poetics and thought, such as the obvious pantheistic idea behind the spiritual image of ‘i cieli / La chiesa sono, / E son gli atomi i clerci ed i fedeli’ (CP, p. 79, ll. 46-48). We have to consider, however, the following: firstly, that Camerana was already familiar with Baudelaire’s methodological use of ‘when’ at the beginning of a stanza, as seen above when comparing ‘Quando il soave sguardo...’ to ‘L’Aube spirituelle’; and secondly, that before officially entering his Scapigliatura period, in ‘Natura e pensiero’ had already incorporated elements clearly derived from the Baudelairean depiction of nature in ‘Correspondances’ and

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

‘Élévation’. It is very likely that Camerana did not simply pretend to emulate Praga and had, in actuality, the intention to mimic Baudelaire, as affirmed by Giannangeli, but that he wanted to demonstrate Praga that the two of them shared a common poetics – and he would do the same, a few months later, with respect to Boito in the poem dedicated to him – which, most notably, involved a Baudelairean vision of nature with its indistinct and spiritual words solely interpreted by the poet. We have to partially disagree with Giannangeli when he claims that Camerana’s “‘mistiche parole” non sono dello amico corrispondente, ma di Baudelaire’.<sup>51</sup> These words belong to Baudelaire and Camerana indeed drew them from ‘Correspondances’, though undoubtedly knowing that Praga had personally adapted them before him in his poem ‘Monasterium’, analysed in Chapter II.2.5, where Praga makes flowers dance and speak softly at sundown by means of the ‘confusi suoni’ that obviously recall the ‘confuses paroles’ of Baudelaire’s ‘Correspondances’. Noteworthy to Camerana’s and Praga’s affinity in the representation of the natural landscape is also the fact that, once again, there are clear analogies between Camerana’s Baudelairean description of nature and Praga’s ‘Paesaggi’, published only in 1869 in *Fiabe e leggende* – the ‘rantolo o sospiro’ and ‘sovrumano eloquio / della natura queta’ of ‘Paesaggi V’ cannot but recall the ‘sospiri lunghi e fiochi’ and the ‘mistiche parole’ of Camerana’s ‘A Emilio Praga’. Furthermore, for the image of the ‘tremule danze’ of the will-o’-the-wisp at the beginning of the second stanza of ‘A Emilio Praga’, Camerana seems to have merged two expressions, one by Praga and the other by Baudelaire. If on the one hand the image is related to the ‘danza del leggiadro stelo’ that occurs at dusk in ‘Monasterium’, on the other Camerana’s trembling dance is

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<sup>51</sup> *La bruna armonia di Camerana*, p. 171.

significantly close to the flower ‘vibrant sur sa tige’ that introduces the waltz of sounds and natural scents ‘dans l’air du soir’ of ‘Harmonie du soir’.

Concerning the Romantic and idealistic idea of a mystical nature that enigmatically speaks to the poet, in ‘A Emilio Praga’ the core of Camerana’s Baudelairian vision of nature seems not to have changed much since ‘Natura e pensiero’. It is the practical application of that vision by means of the poetic devices of analogy that marks the true development of Camerana’s post-1863 poetry: it is not by chance that, in this instance as in many other instances starting from ‘A Emilio Praga’, one of the most common analogies for Camerana is that between natural elements and human figures, involving objects, moods, and feelings strictly related to his human subjects. In the passages of ‘A Emilio Praga’ quoted above, the first comparison of this type is between earth and a moribund yet attractive woman, a ‘bella e strana moribonda’, who sighs, speaks, and implores the sun, considered as the charming eye of her lover, to return; a rather similar image and technique would also reoccur in the 1882 poem ‘Note morenti’.<sup>52</sup> This sensual, and at the same time macabre, atmosphere continues in the second stanza with the analogy between the vibrating dances over graves of the will-o’-the-wisp and the human image of the group of prostitutes, the ‘allegro stuolo di sgualdrine’, which indirectly expresses the speaker’s erotic desire. This last image, and especially the references to flames (‘fatue fiammelle’) and prostitutes, mirrors the opening of the third stanza, where Camerana describes the arousing of sexual craving for the inhabitants of the modern city, juxtaposed with the turning on of the city’s lights at nightfall: ‘tutta di faci e di voglie / In altra parte accendesi / La città peccatrice’ (CP, p. 78, ll. 17-19). The

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<sup>52</sup> Lines 3-5 of ‘Note morenti’ (CP, p. 22) go thus: ‘Come una grande affranta la campagna sospira. / Baccian le nebbie il prato, le nebbie il prato attira / Voluttuoso’.

specific references to prostitutes, desire, the action of turning on lights, and the modern city at dusk all find their origin in the single line ‘La Prostitution s’allume dans les rues’ of Baudelaire’s ‘Le Crépuscule du soir’ (OC I, p. 95, l. 15).

The direct juxtaposition of a natural landscape and the physical or emotional features of the woman is a literary technique very rarely employed by the other Scapigliati, but characteristic of Baudelaire’s and Camerana’s poetry. As Leakey has argued, ‘the notion of correspondences [...] is in fact exploited by Baudelaire mainly for amorous and sentimental purposes’<sup>53</sup> and, as we shall progressively see in this chapter, the association of feminine subject and natural scenery through the medium of the analogy occurs several times in Camerana’s poems at the time of Scapigliatura. This kind of use of analogy must be considered amongst Camerana’s first subjective representations of the natural landscape, and as the very first experimentations with that analogical symbolism which is generally thought to commence only much later in Camerana’s poetic production. After all, in his 1869 article ‘Società promotrice in Torino’ for the journal *L’Arte in Italia*, after lashing out at contemporary Italian criticism that ‘sputa sul cranio di Baudelaire’, Camerana advances an idea that is tightly related to these first poetic experimentations with the analogy: that of subjective ‘interpretazione della realtà, a seconda delle vedute di ognuno’, arguing that ‘Arte vera senza poesia non può essere, non è anzi; e la poesia emana tutta dalla interpretazione, ove il pensiero dell’artista si stringe in gagliardo

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<sup>53</sup> *Baudelaire and Nature*, p. 245. See also the prose poem ‘L’Invitation au voyage’, where Baudelaire writes, referring to a ‘vieille amie’ who is described as a ‘Fleur incomparable’: ‘Ne serais-tu pas encadrée dans ton analogie, et ne pourrais-tu pas te mirer, pour parler comme les mystiques, dans ta propre *correspondance*?’ (OC I, pp. 301, 303).



connubio colla realtà, e fugge dalla imitazione in cui il pensiero non aleggia, non comanda, non brilla'.<sup>54</sup>

What we see in 'A Emilio Praga' is that, even though Camerana theoretically announces the similarity between his and Praga's treatment of nature by means of a Baudelairean terminology drawn from 'Correspondances' and 'Élévation', in fact the practical application of this Baudelairean method in his poetry shows significant differences compared to Praga's. In spite of a similar focus on the use of the analogy between the human being and nature, Praga is more interested in representing the intermingling of sensory perceptions in relation to natural elements, and therefore in the poet's physical sensations – artistically transfigured through synaesthesia – associated with natural objects, such as with the passage 'se la fanfara delle tue parole / mi profumasse di giranii e viole'. On the other hand, aside from a few isolated cases in which Camerana describes the mistress with natural elements belonging to the sensory spheres, the specific link between the natural landscape and the somatic or emotional features of the feminine figure entails a more thoroughly subjective interpretation (and transmutation) of nature, which comes to include the moral feelings of the poet.

Other straightforward references to 'Correspondances', as well as to the personal relationship the poet establishes with nature, can be found in 'Ad un amico', written in February 1866 (CP, pp. 86-87). It is probable that, as Giannangeli affirms, Camerana's use of the alexandrine as poetic metre is a Baudelairean choice, and that the natural object listed at the incipit of the poem, such as the 'difformi boschi', the 'piani sconfinati', the 'pace arcana' of the 'lago', or the 'vallèa' (ll. 2-4) all recall the

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<sup>54</sup> 'Società promotrice in Torino', *L'Arte in Italia*, 1869, pp. 77-78.

natural elements of 'Élévation';<sup>55</sup> but I believe that a more distinct Baudelairian influence is to be found in other passages of 'Ad un amico'. The first stanza continues with the following verses:

Amo le mille voci che a noi manda Natura  
Dai sepolcri, dai fiori, dall'acque e da la pura  
Volta del ciel: canzone che a languidi frammenti  
Il poeta raccoglie ne' suoi più sacri accenti. (ll. 7-10)

It is difficult not to compare, yet again, this representation of 'Natura' to: Baudelaire's 'Nature' (with an allegorical capital 'N') of 'Correspondances'; the poet as the interpreter of the 'immortale / Linguaggio' and the 'arcani accenti' of nature in 'Natura e pensiero'; 'A Emilio Praga', where Camerana described nature's 'alte voci', the 'sospir lunghi e fiochi / E mistiche parole'; as well as to the newfound duality of his depictions of the pastoral landscape, in which he inserted macabre features associated with the human being (and, in 'Ad un amico', symbolised by the reference to the 'sepolcri'). What these 'mille voci' of nature are is explained in the third stanza, where, for the most part, there is a dualistic depiction of nature that entails a subjective association of the various sounds of natural elements with the voice of the human being. The poet's interpretation of nature by means of what he calls his 'intima elegia' (l. 28), therefore, unifies the natural and the human, introducing personal emotions, such as sorrow or rage, to the natural picture: the 'vortici superbi d'un montano torrente' are, to the speaker's ear, 'un urlo terribile, com'ira di potente' (ll. 31-32); the dove, a bird traditionally the symbol of innocence and purity, 'Spande il suo flebil gemito' (ll. 33-34); and the 'tuono' has a 'grande voce' which 'Precipita dal nembo' (l. 35). Even non-natural sounds, such as the

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<sup>55</sup> *La bruna armonia di Camerana*, p. 53.

warlike tune of the Roman tuba here implicitly associated with the thunder – some post-1880 poems in which the sound of the tuba is described as coming out of clouds shine a light on this passage<sup>56</sup> – or the music of the minstrel's harp, take on anthropomorphic features – and a human or pseudo-human voice: 'Voce de la battaglia è de le tube il suono' (l. 36); 'Qual sospir di fantasma, l'arpa del menestrello / Odo fremere ancora' (ll. 38-39). The concluding line of this third stanza of 'Ad un amico' recapitulates the connection between nature and the feelings of the poet through the image of the 'tree of poetry' that we have already seen in 'Natura e pensiero' and 'Bénédiction'. In this specific case, the despicable fruit that 'l'albero del mio canto' grows is, metaphorically, the poet's 'pianto' (ll. 41-42). Significantly, the connection to the 'arbre misérable' of 'Bénédiction' is even more evident here, as in both compositions the figurative product of this tree, flower for Baudelaire and fruit for Camerana, is in fact the painful and tragic poetry of the lyrical I: 'inamabil frutto' in Camerana and 'boutons empestés' in Baudelaire.

In Chapters II.1.7 and II.2.5, it was shown that Baudelaire often gives a human voice to natural or artificial objects, particularly to forests (concerning the natural) and musical instruments (regarding the artificial), occasionally putting them together such as in 'Obsession', where he writes: 'Grands bois [...] Vous hurlez comme l'orgue'. This practice is also evidently employed by Camerana, in the lines from 'Ad un amico' just quoted. It has to be pointed out, first of all, that in Camerana this is not a transitory or short-lived technique related merely to his Scapigliatura phase. In other words, it is an active part of Camerana's interiorisation of nature, and

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<sup>56</sup> See the lines 'Dai precordi pareo del mostro biondo / Lo squillo uscisse di un milion di tube' from the 1885 poem 'Gloria in excelsis' (CP, p. 142, ll. 9-10), or the 'guerrier / Suon delle trombe' coming from the 'squarciate / Nubi di zolfo' portrayed in the 1895 composition 'Su, galoppate adunque...' (CP, p. 36, ll. 5-7).

more generally of external reality, that begins with *Scapigliatura* but would continue in his later work, occasionally with expressions that closely match Baudelaire's thus demonstrating the latter's impact with respect to this poetic method. Several of Camerana's future compositions would feature natural and human-made objects portrayed as having a human voice, with images that are easily comparable to those included in 'Ad un amico' and cited above, as well as to Baudelaire's 'Obsession'. For instance, as regards the compositions of the 1880s, see the 'immane organo urlante' in 'Basilea' (CP, p. 21, l. 9) and the 'torrente' that 'urla' in 'È la festa doman...' (CP, p. 51, l. 4); concerning poems of the 1890s, see the 'Reno [...] che inabissi urlando' of 'La piva' (CP, p. 270, l. 3), or the 'voce d'arpa' of the fifth sonnet included in the cycle 'La Femme' (CP, p. 185, l. 8); and, on the subject of Camerana's work of the 1900s, see the 'urla di duol' of the 'torrenti' and the 'selve mugghianti come un organo' of the poem 'Strofe all'Idolo' (CP, p. 191, l. 16; p. 192, l. 45), or the 'crescente voce / D'organo' of sonnet IV of 'Ad Arnoldo Böcklin' (CP, p. 198, ll. 12-13). Indeed, at this later stage of Camerana's career nature would be entirely broken down to its bare elements, leaving only vague forms, sounds, and colours, which would be analogically – and sometimes oxymoronically – associated in a purely subjective fashion to the poet's mood, thus forming a mysterious symbolism. And yet I would argue that, together with other illustrations of psychological landscape that shall be analysed further on, 'Ad un amico' is a fine example of Camerana's first experimentations with the subjectification, interiorisation, and transfiguration of nature.

### 3. Woman and Landscape: a Baudelairian Analogy

In these years, probably also influenced by the themes that other Scapigliati – as well as Baudelaire – treated, it is the beauty and grace of the feminine figure that is mostly associated with the landscape. However, although for Boito and Praga the duality of woman – with both her angelic and devilish/erotic characteristics – is a focal point of their poetic discourse, it is Baudelaire who truly influences Camerana with respect to the relation between feminine subject and natural scenery. This relation would surely be a central and very significant feature of Camerana's future work, as already noted by scholars: discussing the latter's 'mature' compositions and especially his poetic landscapes, Croce posits that 'la figura di donna, che appare nei suoi versi, è fatta come quei paesaggi'.<sup>57</sup> Here below I shall demonstrate that the notion of the resemblance of the woman to the landscape (and vice-versa) – which according to Giannangeli is evident only from 1870 onwards, starting with the poem 'Sei la dea, sei la stella...' <sup>58</sup> – is already central to and crucial in Camerana's Scapigliatura phase.

In an article on Pierre Dupont published in 1861, writing about a poem by this author, 'La Promenade sur l'eau', Baudelaire seems to justify many of the instances in his own poetry where there is an analogy between the mistress and the landscape:

Grâce à une opération d'esprit toute particulière aux amoureux quand ils sont poètes, ou aux poètes quand ils sont amoureux, la femme s'embellit de toutes les grâces du paysage, et le paysage profite occasionnellement des grâces que la femme aimée verse à son insu sur le ciel, sur la terre et sur les flots. (OC II, p. 174)

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<sup>57</sup> *La letteratura della nuova Italia*, p. 276.

<sup>58</sup> *La bruna armonia di Camerana*, p. 161.

Baudelaire here portrays two poetic processes, a first in which the woman benefits from the beauties of the landscape, and a second that, in opposition to the first, defines the landscape as benefitting from the beauties of the woman. Of the two processes, the one most used by Baudelaire and, in his wake, by Camerana is the former, although both take into account the description of nature with womanlike features too, as seen, as regards Camerana, in the lines ‘Quando una bella e strana moribonda / Appar la terra’ from ‘A Emilio Praga’. In Baudelaire’s and Camerana’s respective poetic work, the process involving this type of analogy comprises in particular the mistress’ eyes and face likened to various components of the natural scenery, most notably the colours of the sky, mist, fog, vapour, and clouds.

Camerana’s poem ‘Noi c’incontrammo...’ (CP, p. 218), dated November 1865, is structured around the juxtaposition of the natural elements with two different human features, one linked to the feminine subject’s physical appearance, and the other to the figurative interpretation of those natural elements as positive or negative events that occurred in her life, such as the hopeful flower ‘Del tuo blando avvenire’ that she was looking for (ll. 9-12), or the ‘ginepro e l’irto cardo’ which symbolise the misfortunes she found instead (ll. 13-16). If the poem begins with a trite and banal comparison of the beauty of the woman to that of a star, to wit ‘Tu serena e bella / Come una stella’ (ll. 1-2), the following simile describing her prettiness, ‘Come un sogno d’amore in Oriente’ (l. 3), recalls the peculiar fashion in which Baudelaire discusses the dreamy and Oriental aspects of the lover’s beauty in the line ‘sa rêveuse allure orientale’ from ‘Un fantôme I’ (OC I, p. 38, l. 11). The image of the Oriental appeal of the woman returns in ‘L’Invitation au voyage’, where Baudelaire describes ‘La splendeur orientale’ (OC I, p. 53, l. 23) of the land that,

according to the poet's subjective vision, resembles the grace of the mistress' treacherous eyes:

Les soleils mouillés  
De ces ciels brouillés  
Pour mon esprit ont les charmes  
Si mystérieux  
De tes traîtres yeux,  
Brillant à travers leurs larmes. (ll. 7-12)

At first glance, the analogy between the sun and the fascinating eyes of the lover calls into mind the 'innamorante occhio del sole' seen above when examining 'A Emilio Praga'. More significant to the present analysis, this very passage of Baudelaire's poem shares a similar technique as well as human and natural elements with the following second quatrain from 'Noi c'incontrammo...':

Noi c'incontrammo. L'azzurro del cielo  
Pareva un velo,  
Nebbia pareva presso il tuo languente  
Occhio pieno di speranze; occhio divin. (ll. 5-8)

The unusual image of the azure sky that looks like a veil, most likely the one worn by the mistress, entails the influence of an object linked to her attractiveness and mood – the woman was previously described as 'serena', meaning 'serene mood' but also 'clear sky', and 'bella' – on the natural element, in a similar manner to Baudelaire who relates the charms of suns and skies to the lover's features. Similar images involving the cerulean colour of the sky and the mistress' physical look would be employed by Camerana elsewhere: in the 1867 composition 'O bella dama...', as we shall see shortly; and almost twenty years later in 'Il velo nero' (1884), which is centred upon the image of the woman's veil. 'Il velo nero', as Finzi has claimed, 'è citata dalla critica quasi sempre con riferimento a Baudelaire, che qui

in maniera più evidente vi sarebbe modello e antecedente'.<sup>59</sup> There, beside the sensuality of the black veil that gives title to the poem, Camerana talks about the hair of the ardently desired feminine subject, inverting the process that in 'Noi c'incontrammo...' compared the 'azzurro del cielo' to the mistress' veil ('*Pareva un velo*', my italic), defining the 'capelli d'abisso e di fuligine' of the same colour as the sky: 'Negri cotanto da *parer* cerulei!' (CP, p. 139, ll. 14-15, my italic). It is, however, the last two lines of the second quatrain of 'Noi c'incontrammo...' that fully reveal the significance of the Baudelairean method for Camerana. This latter poet takes the cue of the comparison, in the passage from 'L'Invitation au voyage' quoted above, between a misty sky and the eyes of the mistress, which delineates the ambiguous and shadowy gaze that conveys her contrasting feelings. If in Baudelaire the woman's eyes are full of tears and thus likened to the misty skies but, simultaneously, are mysteriously deceitful since behind the tears it seems that her eyes communicate a different emotion, the lover's divine eye in Camerana is characterised by the metaphorical presence of fog, which helps to portray the physical image of an indolent and watery eye that nonetheless expresses hope for the future.

Indeed, it might also be argued that the actual source of the second quatrain of 'Noi c'incontrammo...' is to be searched for in the other poems in which Baudelaire writes about the vagueness of the mistress' gaze by means of the association between fog, mist, or vapour and the woman's languid eyes. While not strictly about a real feminine figure, in 'La Géante' Baudelaire claims that he would like to guess about the giantess' passion by looking at her 'humides brouillards qui

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<sup>59</sup> 'Note ai testi', p. 297.



nagent dans ses yeux’ (OC I, p. 22, ll. 7-8). ‘Ciel brouillé’, on the contrary, maintains the rhyme mouillés/brouillés to describe the eyes of the mistress as well as the blurred and impressionistic landscape seen in ‘L’Invitation au voyage’, changing it slightly (‘paysage mouillé’/ciel brouillé’) and introducing the idea of ‘brumeuses saisons’ (OC I, p. 49, ll. 10-12). This poem paints a rather *indefinite* picture that appears very close to Camerana’s inclusion of fog within the description of the lover’s languorous eye:

On dirait ton regard d’une *vapeur couvert*;  
 Ton œil mystérieux (est-il bleu, gris ou vert?)  
 Alternativement tendre, rêveur, cruel,  
 Réfléchit l’*indolence* et la pâleur du ciel. (ll., 1-4, my italics)

The intermingling of the physical features of the woman and the various components of the landscape into a single poetic image is characteristic of Camerana’s other compositions of the years 1864-1869, such as the following passage from ‘Lilium’, written in November 1867:

Come la *tenue nuvola*  
 Dai *candidi* splendori,  
 Avea sul *volto* i mistici  
*Riflessi* del mattin. (CP, p. 93, ll. 5-8, my italics)

On the one hand, the expressions ‘tenue nuvola’, ‘candidi’, ‘volto’, and ‘Riflessi’ can be compared, in terms of vocabulary, to the ‘vapeur couvert’ of the lover’s *gaze* and of her eye that *reflects* the *whiteness* of the sky as illustrated by Baudelaire in ‘Ciel brouillé’. On the other hand, the function of the simile that characterises the description of the woman’s face in a peculiar fashion, juxtaposing a natural image of the sky to her facial appearance, finds its probable origin in another Baudelairian composition, that is to say ‘À celle qui est trop gaie’:

Ta tête, ton geste, ton air  
Sont beaux comme un beau paysage;  
Le rire joue en ton visage  
Comme un vent frais dans un ciel clair. (OC I, p. 156, ll. 1-4)

In the following excerpt taken from the first stanza of ‘O bella dama...’, Camerana employs the simile once again to depict, in this case, both the sensual eyes and the face of the mistress likened to a pastoral landscape at nightfall, a picture that would also be similarly portrayed a few decades later in ‘Salammbô’ (1901) with the lines ‘Dai neri occhi usciran [...] alterezze d’inconturbato mare; / Fascini vaghi avrai d’alba lunare’ (CP, p. 40, ll. 5-7):

O bella dama dalla chioma nera  
La tua faccia è tranquilla  
Come campagna quando vien la sera;  
E nel cobalto della tua pupilla,  
O bella dama dalla chioma bruna  
Par che nasca la luna. (CP, p. 229, ll. 1-7)

Baudelaire’s influence on this passage can be recognised mainly in the idea, expressed by lines 2-3, of the subjective likeness between the poet’s personal interpretations of the woman’s facial features and of the natural landscape, both depicted as ‘tranquil’, bearing an affinity particularly with the lines ‘Ta tête, ton geste, ton air / Sont beaux comme un beau paysage’ from ‘À celle qui est trop gaie’. This type of comparison is shown by Baudelaire, whether openly by means of the analogy or implicitly through metaphors, in various other segments of his poems, such as those already quoted from ‘L’Invitation au voyage’ and ‘Ciel brouillé’. More of such juxtapositions can be found in ‘Causerie’, in the expression – incorrectly quoted by Praga in his aforementioned letter to Boito (see Chapter II.1.6) and certainly known by Camerana – ‘Vous êtes un beau ciel d’automne, clair et rose!’, as

well as in the following verses from 'Ciel brouillé': 'Tu ressembles parfois à ces beaux horizons / Qu'allument les soleils des brumeuses saisons' (OC I, p. 49, ll. 9-10).

Lines 4-6 of 'O bella dama...' display some Baudelairean characteristics too, in the identification of the eyes of the feminine subject with the landscape that involves the colour of, and elements belonging to, the sky. In the first quatrain of 'Ciel brouillé', Baudelaire talks about the 'vapeur' covering the mistress' gaze as if this latter were the sky, and about the 'œil mystérieux', of a vague colour ('bleu, gris ou vert?'), which reflects 'la pâleur du ciel'; Camerana, on the other hand, describes the 'cobalto della tua pupilla' in which 'Par che nasca la luna'. Furthermore, lines 4-6 of 'O bella dama...' bear some other interesting features. These are related, most notably, to the description of the colour of the mistress' pupil, normally black in nature, as the same as that of the evening sky, namely cobalt blue. Of course, this could be seen simply as a common synecdoche, where a part (the pupil) substitutes for the whole (the eye), meaning that Camerana is, in fact, talking about the colour of the eye – or, more accurately, of the iris – and not of the pupil itself. Yet, two remarks must be made concerning this passage. Firstly, when Camerana reprises the image of the dawn of the moon, decades later, to define the charms of the female subject's physical appearance in the second quatrain of 'Salammbô' ('Fascini vaghi avrai d'alba lunare'), he would speak most specifically of her black eyes, associating them with the sea, which is, naturally, blue and not black ('Dai neri occhi usciran [...] alterezze d'inconturbato mare'). Secondly – and consequently – we have seen that a technique involving the subjective interpretation of the dangerously fascinating blackness of the woman's look as the even more charming cerulean colour of the sky

would be utilised in the future poem ‘Il velo nero’, as part of the characterisation of the lover’s hair as ‘Negri cotanto da parer cerulei!’. Therefore, we cannot rule out that Camerana is literally referring to the mistress’ pupil in ‘O bella dama...’, transforming its colour from black to cobalt blue in order to denote its captivating features – after all, the woman, represented with black hair and a pale face, is rather akin to the feminine subject of ‘Il velo nero’. This technique also appears, completely overturned, at the beginning of the 1870s in the *bozzetto* ‘Sul cretoso declivio...’ where, contrarily, it is the sky that is ‘Tanto azzurrino [...] Che lo diresti nero’ (CP, p. 114, ll. 5-6), subjectively (and aesthetically) changing the azure of the sky to black and consequently expressing the poet’s note of sorrow and menace in the form of a beautiful natural scene in a fashion similar to Baudelaire when, in the last section of ‘Le Voyage’, he exclaims that ‘Ce pays nous ennuie, [...] le ciel et la mer sont noirs comme de l’encre’ (OC I, p. 134, ll. 138-139).

These concluding verses of the first stanza of ‘O bella dama...’ are also noteworthy because they recall one of the rare examples in which Boito takes up, and slightly modifies, Baudelaire’s method of comparison between the human eye and the landscape displayed, amongst others, in the lines from ‘L’Invitation au voyage’ cited above. Whereas in ‘L’Invitation au voyage’ Baudelaire juxtaposes suns and eyes, Boito includes a different component of the landscape, the moon, conveying the poet’s emotions using terms very similar to those of Camerana’s poem. I am referring to the closing stanza of ‘A Giovanni Camerana’:

A me calma più piena e più profonda;  
 Quella che splende nell’orbita d’una  
     Pupilla moribonda,  
     Mite alba di luna. (OL, p. 80, ll. 61-64)

Even though the expressions related to the human's pupil and the dawn of the moon of Boito's and Camerana's compositions paint an analogous picture, the very specific references to the feminine subject in 'O bella dama...', utterly absent in Boito's 'A Giovanni Camerana', reveal a direct link to the Baudelairian practice discussed in this section of the chapter, used by Baudelaire to represent the vague and *indefinite* traits of pastoral scenery – and, consequently, of the mistress' gaze – mainly defined through the changing tones of the sky.

The appropriation of Baudelairian features in instances where Boito's or Praga's influence is apparently preponderant occurs elsewhere, such as in the first of the three compositions entitled 'Ad Sepultam', written in 1869. The deceased person to whom the poem is dedicated, who has been buried and now rests in a tomb, appears to be a former mistress of the poet. In the eighth stanza, by means of metaphors and analogies, the speaker variously defines her passing as 'al par d'una musica / Lontana', 'Baglior di crepuscolo', and 'Effluvio d'april' (CP, p. 100, ll. 31-36), with a process that unifies different sensory perceptions, namely sounds ('musica'), the colours of the sky ('Baglior'), and odours ('Effluvio'), exploiting the idea of 'correspondances' in the same fashion as Baudelaire largely does, that is to say, to use again Leakey's words, 'for amorous and sentimental purposes'. Subsequently, for his depiction of the heavenly woman in the central part of the poem who, given the divine status of her beauty, should not have lived in a corrupted world characterised by squalor, vice, and pain (CP, pp. 101-103, ll. 85-129), Camerana seems, at first glance, to draw openly from the main theme that Praga treats in his four poems entitled 'Dama elegante'. Nevertheless, the direct association between woman and landscape in stanzas 21 and 25, once again through the medium

of both simile and metaphor, shows that Camerana moves between two poles of influence: on the one hand, his friends in Scapigliatura; on the other, Baudelaire. Stanzas 21 and 25 feature similar terms and expressions to those that Baudelaire employs in ‘Ciel brouillé’, such as his juxtaposition of the physical and emotional characteristics of the lover to the visual aspects – or the subjective and personal interpretation of those aspects – of the landscape. The question that the speaker asks the mistress at the beginning of stanza 21, ‘Perché sei nata come nasce l’alba, / Vaga, pensosa e candida?’ (ll. 95-96), with its three consecutive adjectives combining abstract and visual qualities and portraying an *indefinite* image, echoes the following series of repetitions of three adjectives in a row referring to both woman and sky in ‘Ciel brouillé’ (OC I, pp. 49-50):

Ton œil mystérieux (est-il *bleu*, *gris* ou *vert*?)  
Alternativement *tendre*, *rêveur*, *cruel*,  
Réfléchit l’indolence et la pâleur du ciel.

Tu rappelles ces jours *blancs*, *tièdes* et *voilés*. (ll. 2-5, my italics)

As a matter of fact, ‘pensosa’ can be seen as substituting ‘rêveur’ (remarkable here is the fact that Camerana utilises the notions of *thought* and *dream* practically as synonyms in his poetry),<sup>60</sup> and ‘candida’ as replacing ‘pâleur’ or ‘blancs’. Stanza 25 of ‘Ad Sepultam’ (ll. 115-119) follows on a similar note, with terms that are easily comparable to those that in ‘Ciel brouillé’ emphasise the resemblance between mistress and landscape: ‘nuvola lieve’ and ‘voilés’ or ‘ciel brouillé’; ‘Vapor’ and ‘vapeur’ (l. 1); ‘fiocco di neve’ and ‘ta neige’ (l. 14); ‘Raggi’ and ‘rayons’ (l. 12).

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<sup>60</sup> See, for instance, the poem ‘La nera solitudine...’ (1885), which displays a series of equal or analogous terms employed as synonyms and is thus revealing of Camerana’s parallel use of the two words just seen: ‘La nera solitudine alla nera / Solitudine; – il sogno alto al profondo / Pensier’ (CP, p. 28, ll. 1-3).

In some cases, in Camerana's poetry the equivalence between woman and landscape is such that for the poet nature subjectively transmutes into a gentle girl, such as in 'Bel tempo' (CP, p. 224), dated January 1867, in which the anthropomorphic shadow of a forest in female semblances speaks with a human voice, luring the speaker into resting in the girl's lap in order to find peace and inspiration:

L'ombra del bosco mutasi  
In gentile fanciulla,  
E piano pian mi mormora:  
'Nel grembo mio ti culla.

Nel grembo mio riposati,  
Canta le mie dolcezze,  
E del tuo canto in premio  
Ti verserò carezze. (ll. 5-12)

Endowing nature with womanly characteristics was, of course, not a poetic novelty. The curious and interesting factor is elsewhere – it is in the fairy-tale atmosphere surrounding the transformation from shadow to kind girl who offers the poet shelter in her allegorical lap, thereby in the shade of the forest, in order to find solace in nature, in a manner not at all dissimilar to the 'jeune géante' (l. 3) of Baudelaire's 'La Géante' (OC I, pp. 22-23) who, being an allegory of the 'verve puissante' of 'Nature' (l. 1), offers the shade produced by her breast as tranquil refuge for the poet, in the same fashion as a mountain gives shelter to a village: 'Dormir nonchalamment à l'ombre de ses seins, / Comme un hameau paisible au pied d'une montagne' (ll. 13-14). Both Camerana and Baudelaire follow a procedure of allegorising nature, personified by a human-like yet fantastical figure. In his poem Baudelaire is certainly more efficient than Camerana in structuring the interplay of natural elements with the allegorical figure in such a manner that the tension between the imaginary and the

real is always maintained and never falters, but I do not agree with Giannangeli when, discussing not ‘Bel tempo’ but ‘A Emilio Praga’, he claims that the sort of allegory of nature found in ‘La Géante’ never occurs in Camerana.<sup>61</sup> Besides the fact that Camerana himself would later compare a natural object (the dark profile of the forest) to the image of giants in ‘Guarda lo stagno...’, as we shall see, I think that ‘Bel tempo’ demonstrates quite the opposite, namely that Camerana, following Baudelaire, does represent nature through an allegorical, and indeed emblematic, process. ‘Bel tempo’, more precisely its ending, is also one of the first instances where Camerana’s poet, finally overcome by sorrow and pain, refuses nature’s – and consequently, the woman’s – consolatory presence in a fashion analogous to some of his poems from the 1880s onwards, where nature and woman are often seen in conjunction with death imagery. Camerana’s refusal of the relief offered by the forest, the beauty of which instead only exacerbates his feelings of solitude and grief, as symbolised by the image of the moribund man, is displayed in the last two stanzas of ‘Bel tempo’:

Così l’ombria mi mormora,  
Gentil fanciulla; e invano.  
Il piè ritraggo; tacito,  
E cupo m’allontano,

Ché il sereno tripudio  
Mi piange nella mente,  
Come una gaia musica  
Nel cuore d’un morente. (ll. 17-24)

The natural scene not only cannot placate the poet’s sufferings but, more significantly, it greatly worsens his condition. Camerana here takes an idiosyncratic stance towards the soothing capacity of the beauty of nature and woman, as opposed

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<sup>61</sup> *La bruna armonia di Camerana*, p. 171.



to Boito's unrelenting demystifications of the Romantic ideal vigorously expressed in 'Lezione d'anatomia' and *Re Orso*, as well as to Praga's constant search for hope, even in the darkest situations similar to that described by Camerana in 'Bel tempo', in the powers of beautification held by nature, as shown in 'A un feto' and 'Dolor di denti'.

Camerana's poetic practice of subjectively overturning the feelings normally felt in specific cases – where in 'Bel tempo' nice weather and pastoral landscape cause not joy but anguish in the poet, finding danger in beauty, sadness in happiness, rejection within fascination – constitute a crucial characteristic of his post-1869 work, as seen with the transmutation of the azure of the sky into black, communicating distress and danger, in 'Sul cretoso declivio...', and of the black of the 'capelli d'abisso' into the cerulean blue of the sky, denoting fascination for the perfidious woman, in 'Il velo nero'. In Camerana's mature poetry, this practice would mostly convey, on the one hand, his intense attraction towards the dark aspects and the dangerous qualities of both nature and the feminine subject, representing a 'verticalità, che significa tensione alla lotta [...] alla vitalità',<sup>62</sup> and on the other hand the powerful and morbid fascination for death reflected in some of his *horizontal* natural landscapes. This 'angosciosa linea orizzontale',<sup>63</sup> the 'linea del riposo e della morte',<sup>64</sup> embodied in his natural sceneries seduces the poet overwhelmed by a reality characterised by existential sorrow and ennui, to the extent that death becomes a 'fascinante sogno sepolcrale', as Camerana himself declares in the 1886 poem 'Cerco la strofa...' (CP, p. 31, l. 20), an 'ideal meta' ('La ideal meta è ancor...', CP, p. 19), not because it gives the poet any hope of religious afterlife, but

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<sup>62</sup> Moretti, 'Giovanni Camerana: paesaggi d'anima malata', p. 73.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Dell'Aquila, *La poesia di Camerana*, p. 73.

exactly because he can finally find peace and escape earthly sufferings. These contrasting feelings as conveyed by his landscapes constitute a fundamental trait of Camerana's modernity. His natural sceneries, whether vertical or horizontal, express personal moods and emotions: what connects them is, to use Leakey's definition of the Baudelairian landscape, the 'human element common in varying degrees';<sup>65</sup> or, in other words, the notion of interpreting and picturing external nature (whether in its individual elements or in the form of entire sceneries) not as disconnected from the human being, inanimate and unemotional, but as something in which the poet can actively participate and reflect his feelings, and which, thereby, can be subjectively (and aesthetically) modified to fit his poetic vision. Camerana's predisposition for these aspects of modernity, and for his idea of aesthetic *indefiniteness* as represented in his poem-manifesto 'Cerco la strofa...' – where Camerana announces his poetic ideal with lines such as 'Cerco la vaga strofa, indefinita' and 'La indefinita strofa orizzontale' (ll. 11, 16) – surely arises in his Scapigliatura period, as has been demonstrated in this section, in poems showing the analogy between landscape and the physical or moral features of the feminine subject. While sharing, on the one hand, some important aspects with Boito and Praga's idea of 'Realismo' that juxtaposes, and attempts to merge, contrasting notions such as sacredness and sensuality, beauty and ugliness, good and evil, as well as with Praga's theoretical idea of Baudelairian nature, Camerana's visions of modernity have, on the other hand, unique and distinctive ties to Baudelaire, as we shall see next.

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<sup>65</sup> *Baudelaire and Nature*, p. 226.

#### 4. Visions of Modernity: Sensual Sacredness and Sacred Sensuality

The profane, blasphemous, and ultimately irreverent combination of piousness and eroticism, sacredness and sensuality that we have encountered many times in this study is not exclusive to Boito and Praga: on the contrary, it is a customary trait of Camerana's poetry as well, and not merely at the time of Scapigliatura. 'Io sognai. Fu il mio sogno...' (CP, p. 82), written in October 1865, has been quoted by scholarship as an example of Tarchetti's stylistic and thematic influence on Camerana during his phase in Scapigliatura.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, the opening of the composition, the verse 'Io sognai. Fu il mio sogno fantastico' (l. 1), is unequivocally similar to the first line of Tarchetti's 'Sognai. L'orrido sogno...', namely 'Sognai. L'orrido sogno ho in mente impresso',<sup>67</sup> and the subject matter treated in Camerana's poem calls into mind that of Tarchetti's, as well as that of other compositions by Tarchetti where the subject is a beautiful girl lying in a tomb, such as 'M'avea dato convegno...'.<sup>68</sup> One of Tarchetti's most famous passages is the following macabre third stanza of 'Memento!':

E nell'orrenda visione assorto,  
Dovunque o tocchi, o baci, o la man posi...  
Sento sporger le fredda ossa di morto!<sup>69</sup>

I would argue that Tarchetti's influence on Camerana has been exaggerated, and Camerana's 'Io sognai. Fu il mio sogno...' demonstrates this, showing only superficial points in common with 'Sognai. L'orrido sogno...' in terms of that single

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<sup>66</sup> Finzi, 'Note ai testi', p. 291, provides a good summary of the common idea about 'Io sognai. Fu il mio sogno...', affirming that the poem 'è interessante anche per una certa definizione concreta [...] del "tarchettismo" tematico e tonale del Camerana giovane e aperto a ogni influenza'.

<sup>67</sup> *Tutte le opere*, 2 vols, ed. by Enrico Ghidetti (Bologna: Cappelli, 1967), II, 455.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 453.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 459, ll. 7-9.

textual analogy and, as regards ‘M’avea dato convegno...’ and ‘Memento!’, simply sharing with these two poems a general macabre atmosphere involving a young woman. We could point out, for instance, that unlike ‘M’avea dato convegno...’ the deceased girl depicted in ‘Io sognai. Fu il mio sogno...’ is, in fact, not an actual person but the personification of the poet’s inspiration and creative imagination, defined as ‘La mia Musa’ (l. 22), with a capital and allegorising ‘M’, portrayed with a harp – symbol of artistic creativity – with a broken string lying at her feet (ll 13-14). The core topic of the poem, allegorically describing poetic sterility, is thereby closer to the Baudelaire of such poems as ‘La Muse malade’, where the former depicts, by means of a rhetorical language, an ill and suffering Muse with ‘yeux creux’ that personifies the poet’s problematic inspiration (OC I, p. 14, l. 2).

The fourth stanza of ‘Io sognai. Fu il mio sogno...’ subtly hints at the aforementioned amalgamation of mysticism and sensuality, when Camerana writes: ‘Ed ancora l’amplesso dell’edera / Avvolgea quella fronte da santa’ (ll. 15-16). The poet here refers to the wreath of ivy that the Muse is wearing. Ivy was quite commonly associated with the Muses of poetry in Greek and Latin times; yet ivy was, together with the grapevine, also a plant notoriously linked to the cult of Dionysus, and more specifically the wreath of ivy is an object frequently represented in literary and iconographic depictions of Dionysian frenzy and orgies, for, as Plutarch has suggested, on the one hand the ivy’s berries caused a more severe – today we would call it psychotropic – drunkenness than wine, and on the other it was thought that wearing an ivy wreath could, contrarily, reduce intoxication.<sup>70</sup> By juxtaposing the two contrasting expressions ‘amplesso dell’edera’, with the sensual

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. Anna Però, ‘Un Efesto dionisiaco coronato di edera’, in *Gli dei in giardino: due convegni su mito, natura e paesaggio nel mondo antico*, ed. by Gemma Sena Chiesa and Federica Giacobello (Florence: All’Insegna del Giglio, 2016), pp. 100-102.

and physical connotation of the word ‘amplesso’ and the overt connections with both lyric poetry and Dionysian ecstasy, and ‘fronte da santa’, emphasising instead the sacredness of the Muse, Camerana strives to convey the conflicting qualities of his poetry which, in a similar manner to Boito, Praga, and Baudelaire, combines dualistic, and sometimes oxymoronic, characteristics. The Dionysian properties of his poetry are, after all, highlighted by Camerana in ‘Emancipazione’ (CP, pp. 96-98), first published in July 1868, where he plainly represents, with dualistic comparisons that fit into Boito and Praga’s idea of ‘Realismo’, the diverse characteristics of Scapigliatura’s art, the aim of which is to emancipate itself and to proclaim ‘l’impero / Del giusto e del vero’ (ll. 30-31). The poem opens with the phrase ‘Amici, per l’anima / Che brilla nel vino’ (ll. 1-2) which could easily – and variously – be associated with: the four odes to wine included by Boito in *Re Orso*; the title ‘L’anima del vino’ of Praga’s poem, as well as all the others by Praga having as subject matter wine and intoxication; or, being the most likely source of Camerana’s phrase, the Bacchic composition ‘L’Âme du vin’, in which Baudelaire writes that ‘l’âme du vin chantait dans les bouteilles’. Most notably, in ‘Emancipazione’ Camerana lays down the oxymoronic aspects of Scapigliatura’s art, which must treat with the same aesthetic parameters things as different as the virgin’s purity and the pleasures of the flesh, these latter described by the words ‘creta’ and ‘amplessi’: ‘Inneggi a la vergine, / La creta confessi, / Le bili e gli amplessi, / La gloria e il martir’ (ll. 37-40).

A few months before ‘Io sognai. Fu il mio sogno...’, in ‘Vorrei...’ (April 1865), Camerana had already intermingled elements belonging to the spheres of the

carnal-erotic and of the religious-sacred. The speaker dedicates the poem to his mistress, declaiming all the things that he would like to do with (and to) her:

Vorrei coprirti di vezzi e di baci;  
Di baci ardenti, profondi, tenaci,  
Coprirti il crine, la guancia, la man.

Siccome un angelo ai piè dell'altissimo,  
Vorrei gl'incensi offerirti d'amore;  
Un idol farmi vorrei del tuo cuore,  
E me levita del nume gentil. (CP, p. 208, ll. 6-12)

Needless to say, stanzas 2-3 of the poem plainly display two very different pictures. The first one expresses the poet's longing for a physical relationship, characterised by caresses and the fiery, intense, and tenacious kisses with which he would like to cover the mistress' body; the second one, on the other hand, overturns the preceding image introducing religious terms that evidently define their love as spiritual and platonic, such as 'angelo', 'altissimo', 'incensi', 'idol', 'levita', and 'nume'. The passage from the second to the third quatrain cannot but discombobulate the reader who does not expect such a change of tone, with the result that the characterisation in stanza 3 of the relationship by means of the juxtaposition of the poet's infatuation for the feminine subject with the various examples of religious devotion takes on somewhat profane connotations. In point of fact, the two lines 'Vorrei gl'*incensi* offerirti d'*amore*; / Un *idol* farmi vorrei del tuo cuore' (my italics), with the focus on the religious objects (the incense and the idol) that the speaker would like to use to worship the divine woman whom before he wanted to kiss, closely evoke the mixture of eroticism and mysticism of Baudelaire's 'Chanson d'après-midi' (OC I, pp. 59-60), where the poet tells the mistress:

Je t'*adore*, ô ma frivole,  
Ma terrible passion!  
Avec la *dévotion*  
Du *prêtre* pour son *idole*.

[...]

Sur ta chair le parfum rôde  
Comme autour d'un *encensoir*. (ll. 5-8, 13-14, my italics)

The words in italic here above, such as *idol* and *incense* also utilised by Camerana in 'Vorrei...', show that Baudelaire describes his love in a religious fashion; this love is, however, not exactly platonic, for the image of the incense is compared to the sensual scent of the woman's flesh. In stanza 6, Baudelaire vividly represents what seems to be the naked body of the woman, caught in erotic poses:

Tes hanches sont amoureuses  
De ton dos et de tes seins,  
Et tu ravis les coussins  
Par tes poses langoureuses. (ll. 21-24)

Moreover, concerning the image of the poet that continuously and unrestrainedly kisses the lover, Camerana appears to have drawn from the following verses of 'Chanson d'après-midi', in which, on the contrary, it is the female figure that covers the poet with fierce and tenacious kisses:

Quelquefois, pour apaiser  
Ta rage mystérieuse,  
Tu prodigues, sérieuse,  
La morsure et le baiser.<sup>71</sup> (ll. 25-28)

'Vorrei...' is also one of the first instances where Camerana experiments with one of Baudelaire's favourite rhetorical figures, the oxymoron – thoroughly analysed in our

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<sup>71</sup> Noteworthy is the fact that this very passage would later influence the following lines of the sensual poem 'Il velo nero', in which elements from 'Vorrei...' ('Vorrei coprirti di vezzi e di baci') can also be found: 'Ti coprirei di baci e di carezze, / Ti morderei nelle più estreme ebbrezze' (CP, p. 139, ll. 22-23).

chapter on Boito – which is utilised in ‘Vorrei...’ in order to stress the contrasting feelings that the pursuit of love and perpetual happiness provokes in the speaker, hence subjectively reversing the stance that would normally be taken towards love. In Baudelaire’s ‘Chanson d’après-midi’, the oxymoron serves to define the contradictory characteristics of the poet’s passion for his mistress, unifying sensations of dread and attraction: ‘Je t’adore, ô ma frivole, / Ma terrible passion!’ In stanza 6 of ‘Vorrei...’, it is love, or better the continuous and relentless search for it, that Camerana describes with oxymoronic features. Camerana realises that negative aspects can be found within things that should provide, contrarily, pleasure and joy – in other words, that if the dream of love is obsessive and unremitting, it can become menacing while still maintaining appealing qualities, being a ‘sogno incessabile / Funesto sogno e pur caro al mortale’ (CP, p. 208, ll. 21-22).

Of the same year as ‘Vorrei...’ is ‘Nella sua nicchia...’ (CP, p. 216), in which the idea of sensual sacredness is taken literally and, indeed, transposed poetically. The subject of the composition is a statue of the Virgin Mary that lies in a church by the lake, which the speaker watches intensely ‘all’ora mistica / Dell’alba’ (ll. 6-7). If at first it seems that the image of the Virgin Mary manages to stimulate a spiritual awakening in the poet that he has not experienced since childhood (‘E intanto de la casta infanzia mia / Risuscitar tentava / L’estasi pia’, ll. 8-10), in fact the statue produces in the speaker an utterly different sensation. The poet feels what can only be explained as sexual arousal, triggered by the feminine appearance of the statue:

Ma d’improvviso ridere  
Udir mi parve dall’augusta sede  
La santa, e blanda sussurrarmi al core:  
‘Se invece de la fede  
Ti dessi amore? ...’ (ll. 11-15)



The unexpected conclusion cannot but recall Boito's corrosive and debunking endings of 'Lezione d'anatomia' and 'Un torso', as well as of Baudelaire's 'Une charogne' and 'Une martyre': similarly, the Virgin Mary's offer of unmistakably physical love – as opposed to the spiritual love derived from religious faith – must be seen as an ironic statement, finally declaring the supremacy of carnal sentiments over spiritual reveries and emphasising, to put it in Boito's words, the presence of the real within the ideal. And, in actuality, the laugh that comes out of the statue, alongside the very conventional rhyme 'core'/'amore' that is employed not to describe a traditional love relationship between man and woman but to mark the shift from spiritual faith to an implied yet very clear physical attraction, did have a precise shocking and provocative purpose directed towards the average mid-nineteenth-century Romantic reader who, as we have seen in our chapter on Boito, still considered the feminine figure in the same manner as the Virgin Mary, thus having solely innocent and virtuous characteristics. The carnal temptation that the speaker feels towards the Virgin Mary is comparable to that of Boito's monk in 'Georg Pfecher', where, speaking directly to the monk, the poet claims that 'Le madonne di Mèckenlen / Ti tentavano al male' (OL, p. 72, ll. 75-76). Another source of 'Nella sua nicchia...', particularly with respect to its mixture of sacredness, sensuality, and sexual desire embodied in the figure of the Virgin Mary, is without doubt Baudelaire's 'À une Madone', which is based upon the juxtaposition of the poet's lover and a statue of the Virgin Mary. The similarities are conspicuous, both in terms of word choice and in terms of the poet's feelings. For instance, Baudelaire's lines 'Une niche, d'azur et d'or tout émaillée, / Où te dresseras, Statue émerveillée' (OC I, p. 58, ll. 5-6) are personally adapted by Camerana thus: 'Nella sua nicchia argentea, /

[...] Stassi la sculta imago / D'una madonna' (ll. 1, 4-5). While Baudelaire declares his carnal desires towards the lady/Virgin Mary, however, writing about 'mon Désir, frémissant, / Onduleux, mon Désir qui [...] revêt d'un baiser tout ton corps blanc et rose' (ll. 15-16, 18), Camerana finally gives voice to the Virgin Mary, who seems to be offering her love to the poet with, I believe, subtle hints at prostitution ('Se [...] Ti dessi amore?'), depicting an even more blasphemous image and hence only indirectly conveying the poet's erotic arousal in a fashion not dissimilar to the abovementioned passage concerning the 'allegro stuolo di sgualdrine' of 'A Emilio Praga'.

Occasionally, Camerana openly portrays the physical desire of the speaker in his 1860s poems, most notably in 'Memorie' (CP, pp. 211-212), composed in May 1865, once again representing carnal lust through the medium of religious images. The poet defines himself as 'un vecchio romito' who 'scendea nella valle' (ll. 6, 8), before stopping close to the room of the very much craved 'bellissima donna', in order to observe 'con occhio ardente e immoto' the window of the room (ll. 11-14). The poet's implacable passion is such that he interprets the rays of the sun that shine on the lady's window as kisses and caresses, 'Siccome baci tremuli e carezze' (ll. 15-17). He can only express his painful and intense desire for her by describing this with expressions related to religious worship in front of an altar, hoping that the mistress would be as compassionate as God: 'A te salisse il desiderio mio / Siccome innanzi ad ara / Piena del genio d'un pietoso Iddio' (ll. 29-31), an image that calls to mind the opening of Baudelaire's 'À une Madone', namely 'Je veux bâtir pour toi, Madone, ma maîtresse, / Un autel souterrain au fond de ma détresse' (ll. 1-2). As a matter of fact, distress is an emotion also felt by Camerana's poet, as his yearning for

the woman makes him stare intensely at her room, repeating once again ‘con occhio mirassi ardente e immoto’ (l. 32), inasmuch as he likens his carnal cravings to the severe hunger of a poor man overwhelmed by a devastating anguish: ‘il povero che langue / Per fame, e a cui l’angoscia / Macera l’ossa ed avvelena il sangue’ (ll. 34-36).

Sacred sensuality, concerning the deification of the erotic aspects of the feminine subject, and sensual sacredness, entailing the portrayal of the poet’s sensual attraction towards religious images, would be key literary tropes in Camerana’s post-1860s poetry, mingling feelings of mysticism and eroticism, finding carnality within spirituality, spirituality within carnality. For instance, Camerana’s 1890s cycle of sonnets ‘La Femme’ describes the poet’s erotic desire for the woman-goddess (see CP, pp. 181-186); on the other hand, the various poems dedicated to the Black Virgin of the Sanctuary of Oropa – including ‘Oropa, a la statua’ (1894), featuring the obsessive recurrence of the phrase ‘Tu sei mia’ repeated four times in the sonnet (CP, p. 262, ll. 1, 4, 9, 12) – convey the poet’s mystical *as well as* carnal attraction for the goddess-woman that the statue represents. This amalgamation of sacredness and sensuality is, undoubtedly, still quite embryonic in Camerana’s Scapigliatura phase lacking, if not the shocking and scandalous purpose typical of Scapigliatura as shown in ‘Nella sua nicchia...’, the bolder and more profoundly erotic connotations surrounding the post-1869 descriptions of the naked body of the woman-goddess that begin in May 1870 with the lines ‘Sei la dea [...] Sogno una selva e le tue nude forme’ of the poem ‘Sei la dea, sei la stella...’ (CP, p. 233, ll. 7-8). Camerana is, at this stage, closer to Boito’s subtle and restrained aesthetic representation of erotic images as displayed in the chapter ‘Constrictor’ from *Re Orso*, rather than to Praga’s

more direct portrayal of feminine nudity and sexual intercourse of ‘La festa e l’alcova’ and ‘Seraphina’. The Baudelairian elements of Camerana’s combination of mysticism and sensuality, however, are evident in the poems that we have examined thus far, and serve Camerana not only to scandalise the reader and to represent his loss of hope in innocent and spiritual love but also to communicate his contrasting feelings of sensual attraction and platonic love for both the woman and the Virgin Mary, which would truly characterise his future work.

The loss of innocence related to the topic of love is best exemplified in ‘Ad Arrigo Boito’ (CP, pp. 83-85), written in January 1866. In this poem-epistle composed in response to Boito’s ‘A Giovanni Camerana’, Camerana, as Mariani affirms, ‘si compiace di ricalcare non soltanto i temi di quella lirica ma anche il lessico, le locuzioni, le indicazioni stilisticamente più impegnate’.<sup>72</sup> Similarly to Boito, Camerana proudly and defiantly describes the three poets of Scapigliatura as sinful and corrupted human beings, part of a veritable ‘Stirpe fosca e malata’ (l. 6). Amongst a series of allegorical figures, evoked in a poem significantly marked by a persistent use of figurative language employed to depict the *poète maudit* condition of the three poets, is the personification of sexual lust in stanza 4, which proclaims the supremacy of carnal desire over spiritual love:

E in mezzo ai claustrî taciti del cuore  
 Non più ci scherzan le bianche colombe,  
 Le colombe del santo e primo amore.  
 Sfumò il riso dell’alba:  
 Sui nostri letti or la Lussuria incombe  
 Colla sua faccia scialba. (ll. 19-24)

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<sup>72</sup> *Storia della Scapigliatura*, p. 71.

The image of the silent cloisters found within the poet's heart that opens the stanza, which symbolises uncorrupted love described with religious terms ('bianche colombe'; 'santo') and is thematically connected to the first line of stanza 3 (that is, 'Dentro la chiesa de la nostra mente', l. 13), is comparable to the following excerpt from Baudelaire's 'Le Mauvais Moine':

– Mon âme est un tombeau que, mauvais cénobite,  
Depuis l'éternité je parcours et j'habite;  
Rien n'embellit les murs de ce cloître odieux. (OC I, p. 16, ll. 9-11)

In this third stanza of 'Le Mauvais Moine', Baudelaire compares his soul and not his heart to an enclosed monastery, as Camerana instead does, also allegorically presenting the speaker as a bad and slothful monk. The two passages are, however, analogous, subjectively combining an abstract image related to the feelings of the poet to the religious symbol of the cloister. This is not the sole occurrence in Camerana's work of this juxtaposition; it appears two other times, in two compositions written at a short distance from 'Ad Arrigo Boito', once with a precise reference to the Baudelairian equivalence between the poet's suffering soul, the cloister, and the tomb,<sup>73</sup> and a second time when the poet compares himself to a distressed and 'solitario' monk, a 'trappista' living in the 'chostro fatal / De la [su]a mente',<sup>74</sup> in a very similar manner to 'Le Mauvais Moine'. Furthermore, not only in 'Le Mauvais Moine' but also in 'Ad Arrigo Boito' the Christian symbolism related to the cloister as a place of virtue and moral integrity is finally overturned: the notion of the personification of sexual lust that looms over the beds of the 'silent

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<sup>73</sup> See stanzas 1 and 3 of 'Consiglio' (CP, p. 220), written in May 1866.

<sup>74</sup> These are lines 11-13 of 'Avvenire' (CP, p. 88), which was also written in May 1866.

monasteries of the heart', with its outrageous combination of lewdness and religiosity, bears clear profane significations.

## 5. Visions of Modernity: Splenetic Landscapes and Sepulchral Dreams

The figurative language of 'Ad Arrigo Boito' also serves to delineate the existential feelings of sorrow and dejection that Camerana defines as characteristic of the three Scapigliati, as displayed in stanza 5:

Appena, Arrigo, il sol meridiano  
Per noi scintilla: e già invochiamo la sera.  
L'oggi ci opprime come un peso arcano,  
Come un genio cattivo:  
Come l'angoscia de la tomba nera  
Sovra un povero vivo. (ll. 25-30)

The description of the poet's anguish in metaphorical terms involving, amongst other things, a great weight and the sense of burden and claustrophobia caused by it, death and the tomb, and the colour black, recalls the vocabulary used by Baudelaire in his representations of inexorable ennui and *splenetic* feelings in 'Le Mauvais Moine' and of the four poems entitled 'Spleen', particularly the fourth (LXXVIII). Most notably, the first stanza of 'Spleen' (LXXVIII) expresses analogous sensations of oppression and claustrophobia due to a figurative great weight and an enclosed place. In 'Ad Arrigo Boito', these sensations originate from the both figurative and literal image of the 'oggi' that, depicted in the previous verse as a beautiful day characterised by a shining midday sun, in lines 27-30 paradoxically burdens the Scapigliati like a weight and a black tomb over someone buried alive. Camerana fundamentally maintains the general idea expressed in 'Spleen' (LXXVIII), but

changes the key climatic aspect. In Baudelaire's poem (OC I, pp. 74-75), it is the cloudy and heavy sky of a bleak day that weighs like a lid upon the distressed poet, figuratively creating an enclosed and deadly place and pouring 'un jour noir plus triste que les nuits' (l. 4): 'Quand le ciel bas et lourd pèse comme un couvercle / Sur l'esprit gémissant en proie aux longs ennuis' (ll. 1-2).<sup>75</sup> The sense of death surrounding the notions of 'oggi' and 'angoscia' that in Camerana are associated with the image of the black tomb is directly represented in 'Spleen' (LXXVIII), embodied in the 'corbillards' that 'Défilent lentement dans mon âme' and in the allegory of the 'Angoisse atroce', with a capital letter, that 'plainte son drapeau noir' on the poet's skull (ll. 17-20).

We claimed previously that 'Ad Arrigo Boito' features several allegorical figures, which are concrete representations of the speaker's fervent and intense feelings, mostly negative, turned into living characters through the medium of an allegorising capital letter. Apart from the 'Lussuria' that 'incombe / Colla sua faccia scialba' seen above, Camerana speaks, most significantly, of 'la pallida Inerzia e la Tristezza' that 'Come due sfingi, stanno a la [su]a porta' (ll. 67-68). Now, in 'Spleen' (LXXVIII) Baudelaire employs a similar technique, describing not only the 'Angoisse' with organic and animate features, but also the 'Espérance', compared to 'une chauve-souris' (l. 6), and the 'Espoir' that 'Vaincu, pleure' (ll. 18-19). We have already encountered some of these Baudelairian allegories in this study, such as the personification of the 'Ennui', the apathetic 'monstre délicat' with 'l'œil chargé d'un pleur involontaire' that 'rêve d'échafauds en fumant son houka', in 'Au lecteur',

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<sup>75</sup> Most significantly, this very image of the metaphorical lid, formed by the atmospheric conditions of the day's weather, which causes the poet anguish would be employed by Camerana nearly forty years after 'Ad Arrigo Boito' in the following lines from 'Canicola' (1904): 'Tempo di morte, sepolcral coperchio / Di angoscia e d'afa nella cupa estate' (CP, p. 45, ll. 1-2).

which can be closely compared to the two sphinxes and existential companions, ‘Inerzia’ and ‘Tristezza’, described by Camerana in ‘Ad Arrigo Boito’. This is, after all, one of the most distinctive and recurrent methodological features of Baudelaire’s poetry, involving figures that undergo a process of allegorisation. Labarthe, who has dedicated an entire volume to Baudelaire and the tradition of allegory, underlines the critical importance of the capital letter in the *Fleurs du Mal*, and its links to allegorical practice, arguing that ‘La prédilection de Baudelaire pour la majuscule est incontestable, et va croissant avec les années. Cette allégorie initiale, présente dans le titre même, constitue la figure de proue d’un recueil des plus riches en majuscules allégorisantes’.<sup>76</sup> The capital letters in the *Fleurs* hence mark the ‘impressions ou affections violentes de l’âme, portées par la majuscule au rang de puissances despotiques’.<sup>77</sup> In other words, Baudelaire employs the capital letter in order to emphasise powerful emotions, such as anguish, ennui, or even a lost hope as shown above in ‘Spleen’ (LXXVIII), accentuating their presence within the poem, and consequently their power over the poet, by giving them an active role and animate features.

Also in Camerana, the allegorising capital letter serves not only to define an allegorical figure, but also to mark its centrality within a poetic picture, as we can see in ‘Ad un amico’ (CP, pp. 86-87), which has been partly analysed above. In stanza 2 of this poem, Camerana stresses the constant and perpetual presence of sadness in his life by making an allegory of it, describing ‘Tristezza’ (l. 14), with a capital letter, as a ‘bruna fanciulla’ (l. 12) – once again blackness is associated with negative feelings and, as we shall see, death – who has been alongside the speaker ever since his birth.

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<sup>76</sup> Baudelaire et la tradition de l’allégorie, p. 42.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.



This allegorical presence is the veritable subject of the second stanza that depicts the feeling of sorrow as deeply linked to death. After declaring that this personification of sadness is his daily companion, the poet affirms that ‘Essa [la Tristezza] in velo di lutto un dì avvolse il mio cuore’ (l. 17). For this last image, where the poet’s heart is figuratively portrayed as enveloped in a funeral veil – implicitly, although unquestionably, black – Camerana subjectively adapts three lines from Baudelaire’s ‘Brumes et pluies’ (OC I, pp. 100-101). Here, Baudelaire claims that he praises the ‘Endormeuses saisons [...] D’envelopper ainsi [s]on cœur [...] D’un linceul vapoureux et d’un vague tombeau’ (ll. 2-4); his heart is ‘plein de choses funèbres’, overwhelmed by the figurative ‘frimas’ that symbolises his grief (ll. 9-10), and he writes that he would like to ‘endormir la douleur’ with the lover ‘sur un lit hasardeux’ (ll. 13-14). Camerana simply substitutes the Baudelairian shroud with an analogous image, the funeral veil, thereby maintaining the funereal connotations related to the heart, shrouded in an object plainly associated with death and therefore seen as the emblem of the poet’s moral dejection. Even though in ‘Ad un amico’ Camerana, unlike Baudelaire, does not discuss the actual ‘Brumes et pluies’ and wintriness, chill winds and freezing fog that reflect the poet’s inner suffering, he does link the notion of sorrow to that of cold months, allegorically speaking, in stanza 4, of ‘Novembre ormai sol regna’ (l. 51) in order to justify the content of the poet’s mournful poem, an ‘intima elegia’ (l. 28). Taking into account that the poem was composed in February, this reference to an ominous November must be considered figuratively and not literally. Moreover, Camerana mentions, in an entirely different setting, the Baudelairian foggy weather, talking about the ‘sponda nebbiosa’ that the personification of sadness points him to (ll. 20-21). This foggy

shore is another metaphor for death: it is the ‘sponda ove nel nulla tutto alfin si riposa’ and, as it will eventually give rest and peace to the poet, this latter hastens his journey on the ‘bieco mar del tempo’ and towards death by means of a dark boat, a ‘fosca barchetta’ (ll. 21-23). In ‘Ad un amico’, death is not the only negative element that, strangely and unusually, appeals to the speaker as it would do in Camerana’s later poems such as ‘La ideal meta è ancor...’. If in the *Fleurs* ‘le spleen procède à la fois d’un sentiment quasi religieux de l’ennui’, which Baudelaire almost nurtures and worships, covertly celebrating its poetic potential in such poems as the four ‘Spleen’, ‘et d’une conscience très aiguë de la mort’,<sup>78</sup> Camerana literally courts sadness, not only describing it with an imagery correlated to death but also adulating it, for it occasionally provides him with poetic subject matter. In ‘Ad un amico’, for Camerana the allegory of sadness is ‘bella, è casta, è santa’ (l. 14) and, as an oxymoronic ‘dono funesto’ – being both a burden and a pleasure – it gives the poet the lyre, urging him to cry and sing (ll. 19-20). This double and contrasting stance towards sadness and death is part of Camerana’s practice of inverting commonly accepted notions and ideas, as already examined when discussing ‘Bel tempo’, and a similar practice can be found in Baudelaire’s ‘Brumes et pluies’ as well. If on the one hand Baudelaire speaks of the ‘douleur’, the ‘frimas’ that mirrors his feelings, the ‘linceul vapoureux’ and the ‘vague tombeau’ that envelope his heart, on the other he praises this very wintry and grim weather exactly because the landscape, by mirroring his funereal mood, offers a sort of relief and consolation to the poet, lulling him to a sleep that bears many similarities with death: ‘Endormeuses saisons! je vous

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<sup>78</sup> Jackson, *La Mort Baudelaire*, p. 62.

aime et vous loue / [...] Rien n'est plus doux au cœur plein de choses funèbres, / [...] Que l'aspect permanent de vos pâles ténèbres' (ll. 2, 9, 12).

In Camerana, existential sorrow is often coupled with sensations of permanent apathy and boredom. These feelings are expressed by means of a figurative imagery that incorporates, significantly, evenings or dusks as opposed to dawns or middays; blackness and the colour black; autumnal or wintry landscapes, together with the atmospheric elements typical of those seasons; death and the various lugubrious objects representing it. We have already analysed the association between 'Inerzia' and 'Tristezza' in 'Ad Arrigo Boito' – allegorical figures described as always accompanying the poet – where Camerana also affirms that the three poets of Scapigliatura reject the midday sun preferring evening and darkness, stark symbols of evil, grief, and death. The connection between blackness, evening, ennui, sorrow, and death is directly stated in the opening of 'Fra le Alpi' (CP, p. 89), composed in August 1866, where Camerana once again employs allegorical personification to designate negative feelings, in this instance boredom and sadness, which are his perpetual companions in poetry as well as in life, turning youth into old age, day into night:

Squallide amiche de la mia carriera,  
Noia e tristezza,  
Che mi pingete del color di sera  
La giovinezza. (ll. 1-4)

Ennui and sorrow bring a sense of darkness, oldness, and death to the speaker, analogous to the one felt by the Baudelairian poet in 'Spleen' (LXXVI) (OC I, p. 73), and expressed by the lines 'J'ai plus de souvenirs que si j'avais mille ans' (l. 1) and 'Un vieux sphinx [...] dont l'humeur farouche / Ne chante qu'aux rayons du soleil

qui se couche' (ll. 22-24). These two *friends* of Camerana's are slowly leading him to death, for the poet tells ennui and sorrow: 'm'avvolgete nel sudario bianco / A poco a poco' (ll. 8-9), with a sentence that is a clear reference to the phrase 'D'envelopper ainsi mon cœur [...] D'un linceul vaporeux et d'un vague tombeau' seen above when analysing 'Brumes et pluies' and 'Ad un amico'. In 'Fra le Alpi', the poet would like to write about his life of despair, his 'bruna leggenda' (l. 19) – which recalls the 'noire légende' concerning the life of the Baudelairian Faust portrayed in 'Sonnet d'automne' (OC I, p. 65, l. 7) – but, being overwhelmed by sorrow and boredom, he cannot and he eventually gives up on both poetry and happiness by emphasising his status as dejected poet and, consequently, as a dead man: 'Vano pregar. La mia condanna ho in fronte: / "Morto alla gioia"' (ll. 27-28). We are here at the opposite side of the praise to the artistic potential of sadness previously expressed in 'Ad un amico'.

Together, ennui, apathy, and sorrow as represented in Camerana's poetry at the time of Scapigliatura make up his veritable *spleen* that features in several works of the years 1864-1869, occasionally depicted by means of a realism that stresses its deadly powers, intensity, and ferocity. The opening of 'Grido intimo' (September 1865) is exemplary in this instance, with its focus on bestiality, cannibalism, and the act of gnawing:

Io passo nella vita a capo chino  
 Piena l'alma d'affanno e di squallor;  
 Il tedio, bieco tarlo, atro Ugolino,  
 Mi rode il cranio e il cor. (ll. 1-4)

Ennui, chewing at the poet's skull and heart, undergoes an allegorical process: as a result, it becomes both a sinister woodworm and an historical figure, the count

Ugolino della Gherardesca, who was thought to have eaten the bodies of his children to avoid starvation and is represented in Dante's Canto XXXIII of the *Inferno* as gnawing at the Archbishop Ruggeri degli Ubaldini's skull.<sup>79</sup> This action of animalistic gluttony marked by the noun 'tarlo' and the verb 'rodere' finds a well-defined antecedent in Boito's *Re Orso*, where similar terminology is used to depict physical decomposition and moral corruption, both literal as well as allegorical. Boito's allegorical figures, however, are for the most part objective representations of abstract concepts connected to a theological tradition, as already seen in our chapter on *Re Orso*. Conceptually, Camerana's figurative illustration of violent and brutal ennui in 'Grido intimo' is more akin to Baudelaire's subjective and intimate treatment of various negative feelings sketched, by means of rhetorical figures, with bestial and gluttonous characteristics, including, as described in 'L'Irréparable', 'le vieux, le long Remords, / Qui [...] se nourrit de nous comme le ver des morts, / Comme du chêne la chenille', and which 'ronge avec sa dent maudite / Notre âme, piteux monument, / Et souvent il attaque ainsi que le termite, / Par la base le bâtiment'.

In Baudelaire and Camerana, this type of allegory serves to paint a realistic picture that can accurately convey painful and destructive feelings such as ennui and remorse, directly felt by the lyrical I and hence mostly narrated in the first-person.<sup>80</sup> Besides few cases, such as the image of the 'orribile / Stuolo' of worms that gnaws on the bowels of the beautiful virgin's corpse of 'Ad Sepultam' (I), of which we tracked down the sources in Chapter I.2.5 – to be found in Baudelaire's 'À une

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<sup>79</sup> See *La Commedia*, pp. 133-135, ll. 1-78.

<sup>80</sup> A very Baudelairean description of remorse can be found in Camerana's 1880 composition 'Spes unica', where an allegorising capital 'R' enhances the intensity of the sensations caused by remorse: 'il foco / Della tanaglia Rimorso' (CP, p. 134, ll. 5-6).

Madone' and Boito's *Re Orso*, as well as, more generally, in the macabre atmosphere of 'Une charogne' and 'Une martyre' – Camerana's realism is rarely solely aesthetic and depicted for its own shocking, debunking, or polemical sake. On the contrary, it is regularly associated, through the medium of figures of speech, with personal feelings or, alternatively, with metaphysical reflections on the benefits of the unavoidable nature of death, welcomed and cherished after a life tormented by grief and ennui, such as in 'Pax' (CP, pp. 91-92), written in July 1867. This poem treats the same topic, and uses a parallel macabre and realistic vocabulary, as Baudelaire's 'Le Mort joyeux', already analysed in Chapter II.1.4, where the speaker gladly invokes death, and related symbols including the grave and worms, defined as 'noirs compagnons [...] fils de la pourriture', to liberate him from a life of suffering. In 'Pax', Camerana's realism has a specific function: to convey the speaker's morbid attraction for death, for the 'camposanto' (l. 3), the 'chiostra funerea' (l. 6), which, according to the subjective interpretation of the speaker who inverts the negative connotations commonly associated with the symbolism of death, has 'soavi [...] effluvi sotterranei' (ll. 9-10), triggering in him the 'ebbrezza / Strana del fuoco fatuo' (ll. 15-16), because in that 'cataletto squallido' (l. 18), with the 'orrendi lòmbrici' as 'soli compagni' (ll. 25-26), he would not feel the 'tormenti / Dell'affanno e del tedio' (ll. 23-24) nor the 'grifagni / Strazi [...] dell'odio' (ll. 27-28) any more. Death in the form of the 'informe / Orgia de la putredine' (ll. 29-30), hence, becomes the only 'pensiero' and the sepulchral 'sogno' of the poet (l. 33), an expression that Camerana would surely remember when describing the 'fascinante sogno sepolcrale' two decades later in 'Cerco la strofa...'. That is why Camerana's conception of realism, particularly when connected to an imagery of death and/or to funereal feelings,

comes close to that of Baudelaire, who does not spare himself ‘la tête-à-tête difficile, mais nourricier, avec les puissances de la laideur’ but whose realism is at the same time mediated by ‘un processus d’*intériorisation personnalissante* du langage de l’allégorie qui fait du lecteur son témoin immédiate et concerné’.<sup>81</sup>

The Baudelairian practices of subjective allegorism and symbolism would be mastered by Camerana only later on, in his mature years; yet, it is difficult not to compare Camerana’s feeling of ‘tedio, bieco tarlo, atro Ugolino’ that ‘rode il cranio e il cor’ displayed in ‘Grido intimo’ with Baudelaire’s corrosive splenetic sensations, poetically represented by the ‘figures “dévorées” d’ennui et “dévorantes” de l’œuvre baudelairienne’,<sup>82</sup> including images such as the woman’s ‘sens par l’ennui mordus’ of ‘Une Martyre’ as well as those of the series ‘Spleen’. The following, extrapolated from ‘Spleen’ (LXXVI), is exemplary of this practice:

– Je suis un cimetière abhorré de la lune,  
Où comme des remords se traînent de longs vers  
Qui s’acharnent toujours sur mes morts les plus chers. (OC I, p. 73, ll. 8-10)

Following Baudelaire, Camerana’s spleen ‘rompt avec l’expérience romantique d’une inertie colorée de langueur, pour imposer le visage d’un mal dévorateur, d’une sécession ténébreuse dont l’expression extrême est celle d’une tragique “dépersonnalisation”’.<sup>83</sup> In Baudelaire’s poetry, this *depersonalisation* entails that the objects and non-human elements that constitute the landscape of modern life and the modern city become the expression of the fragmentation of the self, ultimately embodying the emotions and moods, especially the spleen, of the speaker. Baudelaire’s *depersonalisation* is, thus, his answer to ‘la supersonnalisation de la

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<sup>81</sup> Jackson, *La Mort Baudelaire*, pp. 30, 34.

<sup>82</sup> Labarthe, *Baudelaire et la tradition de l’allégorie*, p. 131.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 603.

poésie romantique': that is why his poems narrated in the first-person 'soumettent le locuteur à tant de comparaisons, avec le monde des objets ou avec des concepts allégorisés, que son statut devient de plus en plus virtuel'.<sup>84</sup> As Labarthe writes, to Baudelaire the modern city 'est le lieu d'un éclatement du je, le moi se dispersant dans le décor total, tout en s'affirmant en creux, par métonymie, girouette enroutée, cloche fêlée ou chat dans la gouttière',<sup>85</sup> or, we should add, a cemetery abhorred by the moon and populated by worms that gnaw on corpses, as seen in 'Spleen' (LXXVI). In the *Fleurs*, the city of Paris is 'd'abord cet espace de représentation où s'objective l'intuition intérieure, où s'établit la *correspondance* du sujet à la réalité qui l'entoure'.<sup>86</sup> This depersonalisation, which is also a disintegration of the self into the landscape where the 'I' is explicitly or implicitly identified with the objects that compose it, constitutes the very essence of what has been called the symbolic representation of nature of Camerana's mature poems, in which, as we have seen in Chapter III.2, Camerana expresses his inner self through the 'sovrapposizione di uno stato d'animo particolare ad ogni aspetto della natura' and through his 'poetica degli oggetti e del correlativo oggettivo'. It is undeniable that Baudelaire's analogical, symbolic, and ultimately ecstatic representation of nature, best illustrated through the lesson of 'Correspondances', influenced the subjective interpretation of natural scenery of Camerana's 1880s poems, as scholarship has indeed recognised. Two observations must be made, however. Firstly, in the previous section of this chapter I showed that in his Scapigliatura years Camerana had already grasped the Baudelairian analogical method of representing nature, which if in Praga's poetry is

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<sup>84</sup> Steve Murphy, 'Au lecteur (Bribes de problématiques en guise d'introduction)', in *Lectures de Baudelaire: 'Les Fleurs du Mal'*, ed. by Steve Murphy, pp. 19, 22.

<sup>85</sup> Baudelaire *et la tradition de l'allégorie*, p. 461.

<sup>86</sup> Jackson, *La Mort Baudelaire*, p. 85.



practically applied to synaesthetic depictions, is mainly employed by Camerana to juxtapose the features of the landscape to those of the woman. Secondly, Baudelaire's allegorical and splenetic urban scenery, where a depersonalisation tinged with death occurs, also left a profound mark on Camerana's landscapes – much more than on Praga's, for whom it can be restricted to very few poems, among which *Penombre's* 'Ottobre' – which portray not so much the modern city, barely mentioned in his poetry,<sup>87</sup> as the natural and human-made objects as part of a natural setting that mirror the poet's feelings of spleen and death. In his later poetry, Camerana would truly internalise Baudelaire's figurative method of the portrayal of urban landscape, adapting it to his own depiction of natural settings. Written in November 1882, 'Note morenti' (CP, p. 22), one of Camerana's most celebrated poems, shows this debt to the Baudelairean urban scenery, in particular towards 'Le Crépuscule du matin' (OC I, pp. 103-104), on a conceptual as well as a methodological level. The analogies are numerous, involving, amongst other things: similes between elements of the landscape and the dejected features of a human figure ('Comme un visage en pleurs [...] L'air est plein du frisson [...]', ll. 9-10; 'Come una grande affranta la campagna sospira', l. 3); the double repetition of 'C'était l'heure' in Baudelaire's composition (ll. 3, 17) and of 'È l'ora' in Camerana's (ll. 5, 9), which serves to depict daybreak in the former, nightfall in the latter; and the list of wicked feelings and actions that Baudelaire associates with the modern city and the night, and Camerana with the countryside and the day, internal conflicts within one's soul that Baudelaire describes as 'C'était l'heure où [...] l'âme

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<sup>87</sup> Significant is the fact that, in the few cases where he represents the modern city in his post-1869 poetry, Camerana openly refers to Baudelaire's *Fleurs*. See, for example, the poem 'Piranesi' (CP, p. 15), the source of which is undoubtedly Baudelaire's 'Rêve parisien' (OC I, pp. 101-103).

[...] Imite les combats de la lampe et du jour' (ll. 3, 7-8) and Camerana as 'È l'ora che si acquetan gli ardenti / Uragani dell'anima' (ll. 5-6).

The roots of this process of fragmentation and depersonalisation of the self are to be found in Camerana's Scapigliatura phase, more precisely in the projection of the poet's negative feelings upon other objects or subjects by means of a figurative and hyperbolic language, which marks the poet's recognition of the fracture that exists not solely in an external modern world characterised by paradoxes and dualisms that are exacerbated by the advances of science and the loss of religious values, as for Boito and Praga, but also in the poet's inner self that shatters and multiplies, dispersing into images that compose his poetic pictures. This figurative language comprises various rhetorical figures, some of which we have seen above: similes, such as 'L'oggi ci opprime [...] Come l'angoscia de la tomba nera / Sovra un povero vivo' ('Ad Arrigo Boito'); personifications of the poet's emotions, occasionally by means of an allegorising capital letter, which become animate and menacing subjects, including ennui, apathy, and sadness;<sup>88</sup> animal and human allegories of personal sensations, such as ennui, as displayed in the first stanza of 'Grido intimo' ('bieco tarlo, atro Ugolino'). Other types of figures of speech that define Camerana's process of depersonalisation in his Scapigliatura years are the allegorical identifications between negative feelings and natural landscapes that possess some sort of connection to death, such as the line 'Un'ironia son dei vent'anni, un tetro / Cipresso in zolla florida e gentil' from 'Grido intimo' (CP, p. 214, ll. 13-14), where the direct identification of the poet with the gloomy cypress,

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<sup>88</sup> This shall be another important characteristic of Camerana's future poetry. See, among others, the following images: 'Questo incúbo, il Mister' ('A Giuseppe Giacosa', CP, p. 124, l. 9); 'La Noia, incúbo dalla tetra faccia' ('Se non ci sei...', CP, p. 126, l. 18); and the 'ragno enorme, il Male' as well as the 'Incúbo', in 'Piranesi' (CP, p. 15, ll. 3, 7).

a tree that has been associated with death and mourning, and utilised in cemeteries, since ancient times,<sup>89</sup> conveys the poet's spleen. The technique here employed by Camerana, in which the poet suggests a complete equivalence between himself and the splenetic landscape, is related to the one used by Baudelaire in 'Spleen' (LXXVI) with the rather ironic expression 'Je suis un cimetière abhorré de la lune', and it would be re-purposed by Camerana in the 1896 sonnet 'Autunnale' (CP, p. 38). In this latter work, the speaker once again identifies himself with a solitary tree experiencing 'Ore più tristi che un calar di feretro / Dentro la sepolcral fossa beante' (ll. 10-11), depicting his miserable status with images including 'Io son l'albero strano' (l. 1); 'steppe orrende' (l. 4); 'A me i tramonti / Del funereo novembre' (ll. 12-13); and 'io son lo scheletro' (l. 13), eventually calling death – linked to the November sunset and weather – upon himself: 'A me il vento di morte!' (l. 12).

The association of splenetic feelings with autumnal or wintry sceneries and an imagery of death in 'Autunnale' can be traced back to Camerana's Scapigliatura period. This has been previously shown when examining, in 'Ad un amico', the image of the foggy shore, a metaphor for death, and the figurative idea that 'Novembre ormai sol regna', which describes the poet's emotional state during his composition of a mournful elegy. The metaphorical conception of autumn or winter, alongside the atmospheric agents typical of those seasons, constituting a veritable splenetic landscape can be found in 'Lilium' (CP, pp. 93-95), already analysed above with respect to the association between woman and natural scenery. This poem is dated '29 novembre 1867', thereby it is probable that, in this instance, Camerana is literally describing a visual autumn scene. Yet, for Camerana the autumnal picture

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<sup>89</sup> Cf. Michel Ragon, *Lo spazio della morte: saggio sull'architettura, la decorazione e l'urbanistica funeraria* (Naples: Guida, 1986), pp. 119-120.

carries a more profound signification, bearing well-defined psychological connotations. As opposed to a vocabulary centred upon visions of light, clearness, and spring that marks the relationship, set in a joyful past, between the poet and the mistress compared to a luminous cloud, Camerana describes a dark and ominous present characterised on the one hand by autumn, mist, and wind, and on the other hand by boredom, suffering, and death:

Or langue autunno, regnano  
Le brume, è cupo il vento.  
L'antica noia in lento  
Martir mi ripiombò. (ll. 57-60)

The phrase 'regnano / Le brume' plainly recalls the expression 'Novembre ormai sol regna' as well as the foggy shore represented in 'Ad un amico', linked to notions of sadness and death. In order to comprehend its real significance, this picture of sombre autumnal scenery, coupled with the familiar figure of ennui that leads the poet to martyrdom, must be juxtaposed with the celebrations of figurative springtime and happiness discussed in the previous stanzas of the poem, which portray a distant past where the mistress' breast was likened to the 'maggio / D'ogni profonda ebbrezza' (ll. 45-48), and the poet describes the 'fausti giorni', the 'balsami / Dei campi' and the 'immagini / Della [su]a prima età' that have faded away in present times (ll. 49-52). Although the starting point was, most likely, a real scene, the autumnal picture eventually transcends its visual premises, and the components of the landscape – mists and gloomy wind – become signs of the depersonalisation of the lyrical discourse and, consequently, emblems of the poet's present condition marked by boredom and death. A comparable picture is painted in the opening stanzas of 'Ad Sepultam' (I):

Poiché la vita sempre più s'imbruna  
[...]

Poiché la brezza diventò aquilone  
E il cielo grigio si fe' cielo tetro,  
[...]

Poiché del duolo questo mar funèbre,  
Frugai gli abissi ed ho toccato il fondo;  
E poi che ancora dalle mie tenèbre,  
Qual moribondo,

[...]

Poi che giunto è l'autunno, e in bieche forme  
Nella nebbia ulular sembran le piante;  
Poiché possiede una tristezza enorme  
Le zolle sante. (CP, p. 99, ll. 1, 5-6, 9-12, 21-24)

Even more so than in 'Lilium', the symbolic quality of the images gathered here to represent the autumnal setting – namely blackness, strong wind, dark sky, funereal sea, abyss, moribund man, fog, howling trees, and finally the cemetery – is evident, being a fragmentation of the 'I' of the poet who expresses his suffering ('duolo') and vast sorrow ('tristezza enorme') precisely through the medium of those images. The bleak climate of the autumnal picture is thus, for Camerana, a favoured manner of expressing the poet's lugubrious mood. Camerana's treatment of autumnal and wintry landscapes can be likened, without hesitation, to that of Baudelaire in 'Brumes et pluies' and 'Spleen' (LXXVIII), seen above, but also to the other poems of the series 'Spleen', where Baudelaire directly associates his spleen with miserable weather, as well as to compositions where autumn or winter sceneries are more figuratively interiorised, losing all their connections to the external picture and hence becoming symbols of the poet's moral dejection, such as in 'La Cloche fêlée', 'Chant d'automne', or the following passage, taken from 'De profundis clamavi':

Un soleil sans chaleur plane au-dessus six mois,  
 Et les six autres mois la nuit couvre la terre;  
 C'est un pays plus nu que la terre polaire;  
 – Ni bêtes, ni ruisseaux, ni verdure, ni bois! (OC I, p. 32, ll. 5-8)

One of the poems commonly considered as concluding Camerana's Scapigliatura years, before the beginning of the period of the 'Bozzetti' in May 1870 with 'Rammento il borgo...', is 'A Federico Pastoris' (CP, p. 108), a composition that bears no date but was included by Camerana amongst those written in 1870.<sup>90</sup> While reiterating his status as *poète maudit* – the poet writes about 'Una lirica [su]a bieca ed oscura' born out of the 'ora bruna', the 'tedio', and the 'sogghigno' (ll. 6-8) – Camerana claims that he attempted, first and foremost, to create poetry that had olfactory characteristics, 'Ed io giurai dapprima / Di farli queti, di farli olezzanti [i versi], / Come un giardino a vespero' (ll. 13-15), but in his gloomy state of mind he found only 'nebbia e silenzio' (l. 17). Apart from the metaphorical use of the term 'nebbia', once again associated with the notion of ennui and with emotional distress, noteworthy here is the synaesthetic idea of scented verses, which is somewhat similar to the poetic picture portrayed by the 'cadenze imbalsamate / di fragranze di rosa e gelsomino' in Praga's 'Il poeta ubbriaco'. However, in this chapter we have seen that, beside the occasional instances in which he experiments with cross-sensory analogy, including the intermingling of various sensory characteristics shown above in 'Ad Sepultam' (I), Camerana is more interested in a different subjective approach to nature that involves, on the one hand, the analogy between woman and landscape, and on the other natural objects employed as correspondences to the poet's dejected mood.

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<sup>90</sup> See Finzi, 'Note ai testi', p. 293.

Ultimately, in this chapter we have traced Camerana's evolution from his Baudelairism interpreted through the lenses of a Romantic poetics, in 'Natura e pensiero', to a more mature and modern reading of Baudelaire's poetry in his Scapigliatura phase, which can certainly be compared to Boito's and Praga's own Baudelairian imagery but, concurrently, has its own idiosyncratic and personal features that show a profound understanding of the Baudelairian text. Camerana's experimentations with Baudelairian material would continue with the 'Bozzetti' in the 1870s, before reaching the advanced stage of his Baudelairism in the 1880s poems, as highlighted by scholarship. Although some scholars reject the idea of a well-defined connection between the two main periods of Camerana's poetry, before and after 1870, preferring a stark separation between 'Scapigliato' and 'post-Scapigliato' Camerana,<sup>91</sup> in fact the two have many elements in common, and not only with respect to the 'ombre, simboli, frammenti di lessico, detriti di vario genere' belonging to Scapigliatura that Camerana would continue to use in his works.<sup>92</sup> As a matter of fact, similarly to what I have demonstrated in this chapter, in certain seemingly (and deceptively) realistic 'Bozzetti', even though human figures are hardly present, the components of the natural landscape are transfigured by the negative feelings of the poet ('Sul cretoso declivio...' and 'Folta è la neve', CP, pp. 117-118) or they subjectively take on allegorical and anthropomorphic features, such as, in 'Guarda lo stagno...' (CP, p. 115), the 'profilo immane' of the dark 'boscaglia' that 'Sembra un concilio di giganti, un'orgia / Di cose strane' (ll. 5-8) and the fogs that talk to the 'giunchi taciturni' (ll. 13-14) and stretch 'Come fantasmi' (l. 9). For

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<sup>91</sup> Cf. Giannangeli, pp. 158-159.

<sup>92</sup> Finzi, 'Introduzione', p. ix.

Camerana, modernity begins in the 1860s: Scapigliatura, after all, undoubtedly left a clear mark on his succeeding poetic production.





## CONCLUSIONS

In light of the analyses undertaken in this study, can we argue that the three poets of Scapigliatura constitute an ‘école Baudelaire’? The answer is more complex than what it at first appears and cannot be answered with a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’. Baudelaire was unquestionably a decisive and crucial discovery, as well as a (if not the) central presence, for the poetic production of Boito, Praga, and Camerana at the time of Scapigliatura. Very often, the three poets draw from the same poems constituting both the 1857 and the 1861 editions of the *Fleurs*, or, at the very least, from compositions that similarly represent an analogous topic, such as those of the section ‘Le Vin’. This influence originates from two significant aspects of Baudelaire’s verse poetry, to wit the notions of ‘Spleen’ and ‘Idéal’ – following the dualism established by Baudelaire from the first edition of the *Fleurs* – which was interpreted by Boito in his poem ‘Dualismo’ as the opposition between the ‘Arte reprobata’ and the ‘Arte eterea’, between the vulgar yet poetic ‘ver’ and the ideal yet unreachable ‘Vero’, as seen in Chapter I. The bizarre and hyperbolic treatment of the most revolting, gruesome, debauched, and immoral facets of reality, which constitute the core of Scapigliatura’s aesthetics, is thus a direct result of their reading of poems that belong to the ‘Spleen’ side of Baudelaire’s collection.

As regards the influences of this ‘splenetic’ side of the *Fleurs* and correlated ‘splenetic’ reality, we can summarise the following findings of this work: 1) ‘Une charogne’ and ‘Une martyre’ – but also ‘Le Mort joyeux’, ‘L’Irréparable’, and ‘Remords posthume’ – set the example for the Scapigliati’s portrayal of aesthetic ugliness, putrefaction, feeding, and scenes of physical and moral decay; 2) ‘La Muse

malade' and 'J'aime le souvenir...' illustrated for them the general idea of the ill and decadent poetry of modern times; 3) 'Au lecteur' influenced their allegorical depictions of a corrupted world characterised by ennui, sin, and vice; 4) 'À une Madone', 'L'Aube spirituelle', 'Les Métamorphoses du vampire', 'Sed non satiata', 'Chanson d'après-midi', and other poems composing the Jeanne Duval (the erotic) and the Madame Sabatier (the spiritual) love cycles provided them with models for the combination of sensuality/eroticism and sacredness/purity, and more generally for the dualistic and/or oxymoronic representation of the divine yet sensual (and consequently dangerous) woman; 5) the section 'Le Vin', describing Dionysian orgy with pronounced social and jovial characteristics, was cherished and treasured by Boito, Praga, and Camerana; 6) 'Remords posthume', 'Spleen' (LXXVI), and 'L'Irréparable' showed them a new manner for figuratively approaching the theme of remorse; 7) The sequence of compositions entitled 'Spleen' demonstrated a different and original fashion – with no pathetic, Romantic, or sentimental self-reference – to aesthetically portray ennui and related sensations; 8) 'Le Soleil', 'Le Crépuscule du matin', 'Le Crépuscule du soir', 'Le Cygne' and others belonging to the 'Tableaux parisiens' section were considered by the Scapigliati as a source for their thematic and formal depiction of the modern city, or, conversely (by Praga and Camerana only), as the starting point for their treatment of the natural landscape.

The shocking aspects of Baudelaire's poetry directed, amongst other things, at disconcerting the average French bourgeois reader clearly appealed to Boito, Praga, and Camerana. Baudelaire, more systematically than any other poet before him, incorporates features that were not commonly included in the poetic domain. Yet, far from being a mere aesthetic and hollow provocation, the most realistic

characteristics of Baudelaire's *Fleurs*, entailing a focus on prosaic, everyday, and technical language often juxtaposed with a noble and poetic vocabulary, have a precise subverting and ultimately demystifying function against traditional Romantic and Petrarchan conventions that were still commonplace in mid-nineteenth-century poetry, as seen several times in this study with 'Une charogne' and 'Une martyre'. From this point of view, concerning this very function of Baudelaire's 'realism' – since there is another, more figurative and metaphysical, function of Baudelaire's realism tightly connected to his idea of modernity – Scapigliatura's 'Realismo' can be compared to Baudelaire's poetic practice. That is why it is reductive to speak about Scapigliatura's so-called 'maledettismo' and simple aesthetic non-conformity, as I have proposed many times in this work. By means of the most polemical and rebellious elements of their poetry, which are indeed substantial, the ultimate aim of the Scapigliati is to be able to depict reality in its totality, with its unresolvable contradictions and paradoxes, while at the same time debunking the products and beliefs of the modern epoch related to the advancement of science and progress, as well as religious and sentimental assumptions linked to an earlier Italian Romantic tradition.

These Baudelairian topics, themes, and tropes are, however, often conceptually and stylistically developed in a different manner by the three poets of Scapigliatura. There are, also, poems and techniques that only influenced individual authors. The most obvious example is the notion of the 'ideal' and idealistic side of Scapigliatura's dualistic 'Realismo'. In Chapter I we have seen that Boito's poetry features an imagery of vertical flight towards the sky that can be likened to Baudelaire's symbolism entailing the pursuit of the poetic ideal, in 'Dualismo', 'A

Emilio Praga', and the 'Prologo in cielo' from *Mefistofele*. In this section of the opera (see also Chapter I.2.5), the seraphim sing the following stanza:

Sui venti, sugli astri, sui mondi,  
Sui liquidi azzurri profondi,  
Sui raggi tepenti del sol,  
Sugli echi, sui fiumi, sui fiori,  
Sui rosei candenti vapori,  
Scorriamo con agile vol. (TS, p. 107)

These lines, and particularly the various natural objects introduced by the prepositions 'sui' and 'sugli' as well as the image of the 'agile vol' above them, are strikingly similar to the following opening of 'Élévation', which influenced many idealistic descriptions in Praga's and Camerana's poetry:

Au-dessus des étangs, au-dessus des vallées,  
Des montagnes, des bois, des nuages, des mers,  
Par-delà le soleil, par delà les éthers,  
Par-delà les confins des sphères étoilées,  
  
Mon esprit, tu te meus avec agilité. (OC I, p. 10, ll. 1-5)

Besides these few instances in which Boito openly embraces the elements of vertical ascension and the divine that constitute the more traditional side of the Baudelairean ideal, the idealistic features are mostly demystified and eventually repudiated by Boito, who in 'Lezione d'anatomia' undertakes a de-idealisation of the feminine subject through dissonant and discordant juxtapositions that find their antecedent in 'Une charogne' and 'Une martyre' (see Chapter I.1.4). For Boito, the importance of Baudelaire's lesson lies principally on theoretical/conceptual and stylistic levels: apart from a few significant examples of specific textual borrowings, his interest in the *Fleurs* is related to Baudelaire's use of poetic devices and figures of speech such as oxymoron, juxtaposition, and allegory in order to poetically treat the many facets

of the real with no moral preconceptions. Unlike Baudelaire, however, Boito resolves to utterly detach the lyrical I from Romantic self-reference, hence developing an objective poetics that is centred upon the third-person narration. Consequently, as seen in Chapter I.1, in *Il libro dei versi* the poet's preference for aesthetic and moral ugliness is either indirectly expressed by means of irregular figures of contemporary times ('Case nuove'; 'A una mummia'; 'Un torso'; 'Lezione d'anatomia') or proudly announced as the only option left after the loss of the traditional notion of beauty in modernity ('A Emilio Praga'; 'A Giovanni Camerana'). In the bizarre poemetto *Re Orso* (see Chapter I.2), a veritable allegory of excess, the hyperbolic language and the Baudelairian clash between noble and everyday terms, often associated with scenes of animalistic eating, intoxication, sadism, and putrefaction, serve to portray a depraved and violent world where no character is free from sin and vice. Immorality and perversion influence the behaviour also of the supposedly positive characters of Boito's poemetto – Oliba, the conventional damsel in distress who hides a dark side and the Provencal minstrel, the hypothetical hero who eventually commits suicide – and ennui, as well as moral and physical corruption – allegorically represented by means of a bestiary in which worm and serpent are the true protagonists – are the central subjects of the fairy tale. But the setting of the story, namely the distant Middle Ages, the third-person narration, and the choice of allegories rooted in medieval Christian tradition and centred upon deadly sins, prevent the reader from any genuine identification with the subject matter, unlike Baudelaire's use of allegory and his poetics of excess which tend to maintain a direct connection to modernity as well as to the lyrical I.

Praga and Camerana show a rather different approach to the more traditionally Romantic and Bohemian features of Baudelaire's poetry, and, more specifically, to poems by Baudelaire such as 'Bénédiction', 'Élévation', 'Correspondances', 'Le Soleil', and 'Harmonie du soir'. Probably also attracted by the pictorial qualities of some of the *Fleurs* – the relationship between the pictorial techniques of 'Une martyre' and Praga's 'Suicidio' has been thoroughly documented in Chapter II.1.5 – from their first poetic productions Praga (in *Tavolozza*) and Camerana (in 'Natura e pensiero') demonstrate a particular interest in Baudelaire's representation of nature and of the Bohemian poet despised by contemporary society, interpreted by them as natural landscapes symbolising the connection between human being and God, with the artist/poet as the interpreter of the obscure and mystical language of nature. Starting from the successive poems which mark their active involvement with Scapigliatura – although Praga in fact started this kind of experimentation in *Tavolozza* with the musical and synaesthetic composition 'Il poeta ubbriaco' – Praga and Camerana change their attitude towards Baudelaire's depiction of symbolic nature, approaching the latter's doctrine of '*analogie universelle*' (see Chapters II.1.7 and II.2.5) displayed in the poem 'Correspondances'.

From his very beginnings in *Tavolozza*, Praga's Baudelairism is truly multifaceted: taking his cue not only from macabre and debauched subjects, Praga uses Baudelaire's *Fleurs* as a source for the idyllic side of his poetry, for which the Baudelairian textual reference, image, or technique is occasionally overturned to fit Praga's own poetic vision, such as in the conclusions of 'Suicidio' and above all 'A un feto'. In this poem, Praga inverts the ironic charge towards God and modern

science previously displayed in the poem, ending with an idealistic note that expresses the poet's remnants of hope and consolation in spiritual transcendence and natural beautification, as examined in Chapter II.2.4. In Praga's *Penombre* – but also in Camerana's *Scapigliatura* phase – idyllic representations are mainly part of a broader negative context, where they are treated as temporary glimmers or memories of happiness and light-hearted pleasure in an overwhelmingly gloomy present; yet, they are there, and their aesthetic function is not only to be debunked and ridiculed, as happens in Boito's poetry.

Praga's focus on certain sensual, physical, and sensory characteristics of Baudelaire's poetry – as shown in 'Alla riva', 'Larve eleganti', and 'Il poeta ubbriaco' from *Tavolozza*, but above all in *Penombre* with such poems as 'La festa e l'alcova', the series 'Dama elegante', 'Profanazioni', 'Se tu fossi seduta...', and 'Seraphina' – has helped Praga to develop, alongside a notion of the ideal traditionally conceived, a more subjective and personal approach to beauty and to nature. As I have demonstrated in Chapter II.2.5, starting especially from *Penombre* natural objects represented in their sensory aspects are arbitrarily employed to convey impressions and perceptions, whether through synaesthesia or combined together as part of the unity of the poet's senses. The various and disparate sensations that the poet expresses in *Penombre* by means of cross-sensory analogies include: ecstasy and happiness for the birth of his son ('Canzoniere del bimbo II'); sadness while observing the sunset ('Monasterium'); euphoria while wandering around with the mistress ('E teco errando...'); confidence that natural beautification can soothe his physical and moral sufferings and improve his dejected state of mind, instead causing envy for the joyful picture ('Dolor di denti'); the jovial atmosphere



of a Dionysian orgy of intoxication and carnal pleasures ('Profanazioni'); the ardent desire to be with his mistress during his unhappiest hours ('Se tu fossi seduta...').

As a matter of fact, when in *Fiabe e leggende* and *Trasparenze* Praga abandons the most evident aspects of his precedent poetry with Scapigliatura, and with them the sensual and physical engagement with his subject matter, Praga also abandons, for the most part, the sensory and synaesthetic relationship with the natural world. In 'Paesaggi' from *Fiabe e leggende*, for instance, Praga closely follows the notions expressed in the first two stanzas of 'Correspondances', but he remains attached to the spiritual and ultimately 'vertical' analogies theoretically described especially in stanza 1 of Baudelaire's sonnet (see Chapter II.2.5). Many elements of 'Paesaggi' reveal, in actuality, the pantheistic and Platonic core at the basis of Praga's post-*Penombre* representation of nature, in particular the idea of eternal and omniscient nature illustrated in the second section ('ne san più assai gli immensi boschi / sopra cui sono i secoli passati', PP, p. 263, ll. 16-17; 'Di certezze più ricca è la brughiera / che [...] eterna il fiore', PP, p. 264, ll. 21-22), where nature is deemed as more glorious than art ('E la montagna che si specchia al lago / vince in gloria la Venere di Milo', ll. 31-32) and as the gift that God gave to the human being ('è un tesoro che ci ha dato Iddio', l. 46; 'quanti avvisi divini / la primavera dal suo sen disserra', PP, p. 265, ll. 53-54; 'l'anima scena / m'agita e sublima', ll. 57-58). The passages in 'Paesaggi V' where Praga appears at first to convey the feelings of the poet through the landscape he is depicting ('una mesta voluttà ineffabile / assalta i nostri cuori', PP, p. 270, ll. 27-28), hence retaining some characteristics of the personal and subjective interpretation of nature shown in *Penombre* ('Neghi a quei rami un sentimento, un'anima / chi non nacque poeta', ll. 13-14), are part of a

broader evocation of the historical events that occurred in that landscape, witnessed by the natural objects and, consequently, by a pantheistic God. Given the understanding of God that the poet/artist reaches by means of the ‘sovrumano eloquio’ of nature (the ‘eloquenza inenarrabile / del grande Essere ignoto’ seen in Chapter II.2.5), the poet also attains the knowledge of history, for nature assumes the features of the characters that participated at those historical events (‘giuro che a me quei desolati salici / dipinsero l’istoria’ PP, p. 271, ll. 41-42; ‘I salici piangenti hanno attitudini / di prefiche commosse’ PP, p. 269, ll. 1-2). Adapting the Baudelairian analogy to a prevalently Romantic interpretation of nature, Praga celebrates, for the most part, a pantheistic natural landscape, a celebration that was not neglected even in *Penombre*, as seen in Chapter II.2.5 with such compositions as ‘Nox’, ‘Domus-mundus III’, and ‘Imbiancatura’. After all, the similarities between Praga’s treatment of nature in ‘Paesaggi’ and Camerana’s in ‘Natura e pensiero’, itself influenced by ‘Correspondances’ and ‘Élévation’, are striking.

However, after the first efforts with ‘Natura e pensiero’ in 1863, and once Camerana overcomes the prevailing Romantic influence, his interpretation of Baudelaire’s symbolic natural landscape changes sensibly. As demonstrated in Chapter III.3, in the years 1864-1869 for Camerana the Baudelairian analogy is mainly that between the somatic or moral features of the woman and natural landscapes or objects, a technique that anticipates his subjective and symbolic sceneries of nature portrayed in the 1880s. Besides the Baudelairian analogy, which is reserved for the mistress and for the idealistic portrayal of the idyllic yet ephemeral or past moments spent with her, Camerana focuses on the sense of fragmentation and depersonalisation caused by the condition of the modern human

being, and expressed particularly by allegories, symbols, and personifications, which convey the negative feelings of the poet such as ennui, sorrow, and moral suffering. If in his last two collections Praga mostly returns to a Neoplatonic idea of unity between human being, God, and nature, in the Scapigliatura years Camerana's poetics teeters on the brink of fragmentation, absorbing Baudelaire's lesson of the autumn-winter splenetic city and applying it to the autumn-winter splenetic nature, as seen in Chapter III.5 with 'Ad un amico', 'Grido intimo', 'Lilium', and especially 'Ad Sepultam' (I). Camerana's poetics of depersonalisation of the lyrical 'I' would then be further developed not only in the 1880s, as scholarship has commonly argued, but, in a more subtle manner, also in the 1870s with his most allegorical 'Bozzetti'.

Indeed, the Scapigliati did not fully comprehend the complexity of the Baudelairean poetic work, with all its paradoxes and contradictions that constitute the very essence of Baudelaire's modernity. Probably baffled by Baudelaire's ambivalent stance towards nature – which perplexed also Walter Benjamin,<sup>1</sup> who nonetheless linked Baudelaire's artistic synaesthesia and ritualistic process displayed in 'Correspondances' to the latter's concept of modern beauty<sup>2</sup> – they only appropriated the characteristics of Baudelaire's poetics that fascinated and interested them the most. Presumably, they were not familiar with Baudelaire's theory of the superiority of the artificial (and of art) over the natural and correlated 'surnaturalisme' developed in the 1850s, which is pivotal in Baudelaire's aesthetics of modernity and of his notion of extracting beauty from the horrendous everyday

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin writes in 'Central Park', p. 136: 'The contradiction between the theory of natural correspondences and the repudiation of nature. How is this to be resolved?'

<sup>2</sup> Cf. 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', in *The Writer of Modern Life*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings, trans. by Howard Eiland and others, p. 197.

reality (aesthetic and moral) by means of poetry, constituting another side of the Baudelairian ideal which focuses on the dreadful and transient aspects that are subject to corruption and decay, eventually transformed into eternal poetic beauty (see Chapter I.1.2). The doctrine of the ‘Correspondances’ can also find a place in this idea of superiority of art over nature, when juxtaposed to some critical writings of the 1850s-60s in which Baudelaire discusses synaesthesia, including his article on the 1855 *Exposition universelle* (see also Chapter II.2.5). Here, referring to Delacroix’s paintings, he states that synaesthetic correspondences are best discovered when observing nature not directly, by means of a real natural landscape, but as subjectively represented in the work of art, thus bearing ‘un sens plus profond, plus volontaire, plus despotique’ and revealing ‘le surnaturalisme’ (OC II, p. 596), that is to say nature filtered through the artist’s own sensibility, becoming art. Quite simply, if the Scapigliati were well acquainted with Baudelaire’s translations of and essays on Poe, there is no evidence or indication that they read the entirety of his critical writings, in particular his later art criticism (including the *Peintre de la vie moderne*) where the theories just mentioned are debated. Boito, Praga, and Camerana adapted Baudelaire’s poetry to their own personal poetic sensibilities, occasionally detaching themselves not only from Baudelaire, but also from the subjective interpretation that the other friend(s) gave of Baudelaire’s work.

Having discussed similarities and differences, we can now conclude that the Scapigliati’s approach to Baudelaire’s poetic modernity and to the more abstract and metaphysical side of his realism is, ultimately, dissimilar. Apart from the analogous treatment of the subjects of modern times originating in the decadence of traditional values and the resulting focus on the wreckages of science and progress (foetuses,

corpses, cadavers, mummies, but also the modern city), the aspects of Baudelaire's modernity that Boito, Praga, and Camerana individually draw differ. Boito seldom employs personal allegories and symbols and is, above all, interested in Baudelaire's practice of irony and poetic demystification against assumed literary and religious norms, as well as in the latter's representation of certain topics with no moral prejudice nor aesthetic preference. Following Baudelaire, Praga is keener than Boito on the search for subjective and relative beauty, but he is still very much dedicated to the objective portrayal of aesthetic ugliness, detailed polemical arguments and, in contrast to these two, idyllic and idealistic scenes. When Praga does show a subjective and introspective approach to his poetic matter, he focuses more on establishing a sensual and sensory more than a moral engagement with his subjects, preferring cross-sensory analogies to the depiction of psychological dejection. Camerana, finally, is the one most influenced by Baudelaire's interiorisation, subjectification, and transfiguration of external reality, experimenting with his own psychological landscapes based not on the features of the city, but on those of natural scenes.

Taking into account the poems that they dedicated to each other, the epistles, and the poetic manifestos analysed in this study, which include expressions such as 'Quand j'étais jeune et Baudelairien' (Boito's letter to Camille Bellaigue), 'L'amavo [Baudelaire] come una amante' (Praga's letter to Boito), 'E sarà un'arte malata, vaneggiante, al dire di molti, un'arte di decadenza, di barocchismo, di razionalismo, di *realismo*' ('Polemica letteraria'), 'Non trovando il Bello / Ci abbranchiamo all'Orrendo' ('A Giovanni Camerana') and 'alle regolari leggi del Bello, prediligiamo i Quasimodi nelle nostre fantasticherie' (introduction to 'Ballatella'),

we have to conclude that, in spite of these programmatic and passionate statements, they eventually do not develop a methodical, systematic, and detailed poetics of modernity in Baudelaire's wake. To be sure, some very significant elements of poetic modernity are displayed by Boito, Praga, and Camerana, as we have demonstrated numerous times in this work. Nonetheless, unlike Baudelaire, the three Scapigliati do not focus on extending 'the notion of an art of modernity beyond merely an art of modern subjects to an aesthetic of the modern, drawing lasting beauty from the transient, historically bound, ugly experience of contemporary life'.<sup>3</sup> Of the three poets, Camerana is the one who shares more analogies with Baudelaire's conception of dual modern beauty as composed of 'un élément éternel, invariable [...] et d'un élément relatif, circonstanciel, qui sera [...] l'époque, la mode, la morale, la passion' (*Le Peintre de la vie moderne*). Camerana's notion of 'interpretazione della realtà, a seconda delle vedute di ognuno' as expressed in his 1869 article for *L'Arte in Italia* (see Chapter III.3), where 'Arte vera senza poesia non può essere, non è anzi; e la poesia emana tutta dalla interpretazione', which entails that the artist incorporates his own personality, moods, and emotions in the work of art based on certain characteristics of external reality, signals some similarities with Baudelaire's art theories seen above. Camerana's method of subjectively inverting, through the medium of poetry, ideas and feelings commonly associated with specific instances, subverting traditional aesthetic and artistic norms, as shown with 'Bel tempo', 'Ad un amico', and 'Ad Arrigo Boito', can be considered as part of this 'interpretation of reality'. Camerana's portrayals of his morbid attraction for death and correlated symbolism can also be included in this category: besides 'Pax', 'Ad un amico', and

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<sup>3</sup> Michèle Hannoosh, *Baudelaire and Caricature: From the Comic to an Art of Modernity* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), p. 254.

‘Ad Sepultam’ (I), this fascination is plainly expressed in the second of the three poems entitled ‘Ad Sepultam’ (CP, pp. 230-231), written in November 1869. Once again anticipating the ‘fascinante sogno sepolcrale’ of the poem ‘Cerco la strofa...’, Camerana truly attempts to ‘extract’ beauty from a sepulchral scene in a passage that recalls Baudelaire’s ‘j’ai gardé la forme et l’essence divine / De mes amours décomposés’, the conclusion of ‘Une charogne’. Similarly to this last image of the poet who keeps, in a very visual manner, the memory of the putrefied corpse of his mistress described as ‘form and divine essence’, oxymoronically combining matter and spirit, in stanzas 9-10 of ‘Ad Sepultam’ (II) Camerana – not without a subtle sarcastic tone – strives to create his own *fleur du mal*. The poet writes that he would like to see, one final time, the decomposed corpse of the mistress in order to transfigure her macabre forms (a veritable ‘raccapriccio’, l. 32) into a poetic dream, combining materiality and spirituality, drawing beauty from a repugnant image, with the aim of keeping the eternal memory of the deceased mistress with him:

S’io potessi stampar nella mia mente  
Le tue forme spettrali e la tua piccola  
Bara squallente;

Farne il bianco mio sogno, il mondo ascoso  
In mezzo al mondo, la mia luce mistica,  
Il mio riposo. (ll. 25-30)

This further demonstrates that Camerana had grasped, ever since his period with Scapigliatura, the very essence of Baudelaire’s poetry, which helped him to cultivate his own poetics of *indefiniteness* developed in the 1880s and 1890s.

In this study I have shown that the relationship between Baudelaire and the poetry of Scapigliatura is more complex than has previously been understood. I have demonstrated a vast and wide-ranging influence – on a conceptual, lexical, and

stylistic level – on the three poets of Scapigliatura, which can be traced back to the very beginning of their careers in the early 1860s. In spite of their differences, occasionally evident and profound, and far from being simply an element of aesthetic and moral rebellion to *épater le bourgeois*, the Baudelairism of Boito, Praga, and Camerana in their Scapigliatura years accomplished two ends: on the one hand, it preserved some of the more traditional aspects of Baudelaire's poetry, which have been largely overlooked by Italian literary scholarship on Scapigliatura; on the other hand, it introduced a thematic and formal modernity into Italian poetry, paving the way for Decadentism as well as for the twentieth-century avant-gardes.





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